FreeGameNovel
「著作権保護コンテンツ」

ゆゆにっき

あなたの夢に私はいない

[原作] ききやま
[執筆] 日日日
[挿画] 有坂あこ

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PHP

Yume Nikki -
I’m Not In Your Dream
by Akira

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Yume Nikki is the story about a young girl named Madotsuki who travels and explores her dreams every night, never leaving her room. Those dreams are filled with the most estranged beings and places, giving an insight into Madotsuki. Follow her while she discovers the deepest places of her mind.

- It should be noted that the novel is only Akira's interpretation of the original game, not Kikiyama's.

Yume Nikki

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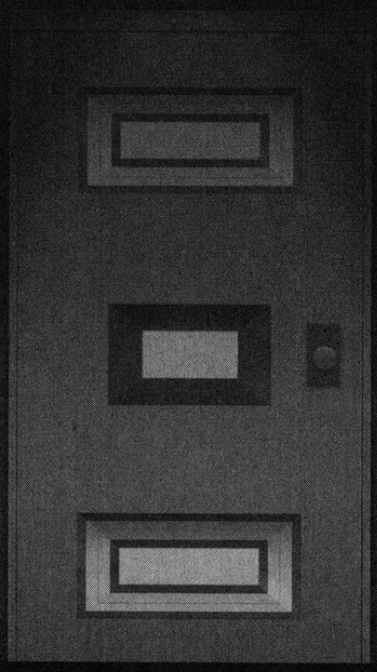

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あなたは、また夢を見ている。

Part 1 - You

You’re dreaming again.

第一部
あなた

Chapter 1: A small room

You are standing in a small room.
Without making the slightest sound, in this dim, lonely and small room……
You simply stand, absentmindedly, as if you have yet to learn how to move.

With your childish braids.
With your clothes, that share the color of awfully fresh guts.
With your head down, making it hard to see your face.

You start to move your fingertips, slightly, as if you were trembling. You turn your head, the movement slow with fear. You take a few steps, walking awkwardly. Then, you look around you. Like a baby that was just born.

Soon, you start to investigate the room around you by yourself, gaining some confidence.
Approaching everything that catches your eye, feeling it, getting your face close, as if you wanted to ascertain its taste and smell.
It's as if you expected an impossibly amusing and interesting story to start here.
As if you were convinced that your actions would lead to some kind of reaction.

But even though you walk and move around, you don't have any influence on your surroundings. Nothing changes, as if it wasn't alive at all.

Isn't it just the same as if it were a dream?
Isn't it just the same as if it were empty?

You start to walk with new determination, set on finding *something*, some sort of purpose. You walk, and walk…
You look like an evil ghost obsessed with this small room.

Eventually, you come across a glass door that seems to lead out of here. As you stand in front of it, you keep glancing back at the room behind you, uncertain.
Then, with some reluctance, you place your hand against the surface of the door.
And you walk through the smoothly-opening glass door, to the outside.

But—

This place is also empty.
It is just a cramped veranda that only leads back to the small room.
There is nothing. Not even plants where a little bird could rest its wings. It's completely deserted. Dead.

There are barely any signs anyone ever resided here at all. There is only the bare minimum: a water pipe, the outdoor unit of the air conditioning and an empty planter, as if the previous inhabitant abruptly got up and ran away in fear one night, abandoning it all before he could have the chance to make anything of it.

You walk up to the handrail, and look back to the small room you were in just now. It's a tall but narrow apartment complex—or so it seems. It's hard to assess its height from where you're standing, and there is no other building in sight. In fact, there is nothing around at all.

A thick, mushy cloud hangs in the sky, near-impenetrable to the shining glow of the moon. You finally seem to realize that this is not "outside". "Outside" is supposed to be bright and free, a world with so many things to look forward to… But this veranda looks like the mental scenery one would have when depressed. The clouds and the handrail create an enigmatic feeling of hopelessness, as if everything was detached from the outside world, closed off.

A sudden suffocating sensation rises up in your throat, and to get away from it, you run back into the room.

You have your eyes half closed, as if you were extremely bothered about there being a meaning to the room or not, or as if simply bored by it all.
The carpet has this strange, vivid design, like pieces of human flesh that had been torn and restitched together. You stare at that cheerful face on the carpet that appears to you to be sneering, as if you'd expected it to start a conversation. But of course, nothing happens.

Everything is full of nothingness.

An awfully old fashioned Braun tube TV. A game machine that could not even be used to idly waste one's time, with only one, extremely simple game. Cushions, scattered thoughtlessly across the floor, though there were never any guests who would use them. A shelf with neatly-arranged books, just your

height. Did you line them up yourself? But the dust is piling up, and the titles are blurred out and cannot be read.

A diary, placed over a simple desk that looks like it could just as well be part of an interrogation room.

And that awfully fascinating soft bed.

You wander towards the bed, but you find the door of the room on your way. Your movements are dull. It’s as if you were afraid of something. You approach the door with difficulty, and touch it with your hand. Immediately you are overtaken with nausea, and you hang your head low, hopelessly shaking it.
You can’t get out—or maybe you don’t want to?

You head to the bed, your only remaining escape. There is nothing else to do in this lonely, boring room. So maybe, at least, you can find some freedom in the world of dreams. You crawl into the bed with the same clothes on your body, and pull the blankets up over your head.
Like this, you could shield your eyes from everything.

—You fall asleep in just three seconds.

Chapter 2: Beyond the door

You are dreaming.

And yet, your surroundings are unchanged.

As if time had been rewound, you find yourself standing in the small room once again.

You can’t help feeling disappointed, but more than that, you are lost; you begin moving back and forth, left and right, aimlessly, fruitlessly. In the end, you stop in place, and simply stand there, bewildered.
A distinct sense of discomfort creeps over you, rooting your feet to the floor.

Given enough time, you come to notice the subtle differences in this dream-room, like a spot-the-differences game.
The cushions are not in the same places. The game machine is nowhere to be seen, as if a means of killing time is no longer necessary. Beyond the glass door, from the veranda, one can see soft, gentle beams of light. It isn’t a closed space anymore. It isn’t empty. No— it gives off a sense of freedom.

But the biggest change of all… is the sound.

As their body moves, humans subconsciously ignore heartbeats, the sounds of breathing, and the creaks, pumps and squelches made by internal organs, joints, bones, and meat. But suddenly, every single one of those noises resounds clearly in your ears.

It’s as though by falling asleep, you have finally started to truly live.

Though it’s a dream, it feels nothing like one.
Rather, it feels like you had been sleeping all this time, and have only now opened your eyes…
The boundary between dream and reality slowly grows muddled.

Having gathered your wits and just maybe expecting something to happen, you

walk softly towards the door. There is a quiet confidence in your steps — not a drop of hesitation.
Gently, you wrap your hand around the door knob.

At that moment, the television screen flickers. Inside it appears someone's sneering eye, its blinking set to an eerie rhythm. Without a doubt, it's looking at you.
But you don't notice it. You can only focus on getting away from this cramped, suffocating room. And so, leaning your entire weight on it, you push the door open all the way.

The door makes a snoring noise, and you stumble forward.

On the other side of the door, a bizarre, mysterious scenery is spread out before you. You stand motionless as you take it in, as if in sleep paralysis.

Around you is darkness, and beneath your feet swim the images of demons and gods. But you have no interest in them, and the wicked grins on their faces affect you not.
Seeing you pay them no mind, they become welcoming and docile, inviting you to walk on. And you do, until you find yourself standing in a nexus of doors.

Even though there is no light, the shape of each door is clearly cut against the darkness, refusing to be swallowed by it. You count one, two, three… twelve doors, forming a circle like the hours in a clock, and you in the middle.

None of the doors seems to be inviting you to open them — opening doors, after all, takes courage, and that holds especially true for this set of doors in particular, with their strange, unsettling designs. And yet, despite your hesitance, you are at the same time eager to see what lies past them. You can feel your heart beating fast in your chest— like when one is in love, or when one is excited before a great discovery. So fast that, if you had a scab, thick, revolting blood would probably start to flow from it.

One door seems to have the legs of a spider stitched to its surface. Another one looks as if it had been banged on by dozens of bloodied hands in a frantic attempt to force it open. Yet another one seems to have a living, wet eye on it. Another is embedded with glaring neon lights, like those in the dangerous part of the city, where one could easily get a headache from the bright, flashing lights…

Walking through the circle of doors, you closely examine each one.
As it'd seem, you haven't quite managed to overcome your reluctance to touch them. So for now, you're only looking.
In truth, you just might be on a desperate search for a hint, something— anything at all— that could tell you which door would be the best to open.

For example, looking at it as a clock, it might be a good idea to start from the one at one o'clock, and keep going clockwise. Or maybe you're on the wrong track altogether, and the most eye-catching one looks that way on purpose, so that you'd go through it first. Conversely, maybe it wouldn't be a terrible idea to take a look at what lies across the plainest one…

But you don't let yourself keep pondering for long.
Logic won't work here, you realize, and there doesn't seem to be any one correct answer. There's no one to guide you, either. Looking at it this way, there's really no reason to think about it too deeply.

You aren't being rushed, but as if you hated the idea of meeting someone's eerie grin in the dark,… with the clear intention of using it for its intended purpose, you gently close your fingers around the knob of the nearest door.

You open it.

And finally, you step into the other side.

Chapter 3: The red umbrella

You stand in a very dim light.

Behind you is the door you just passed through, floating unnaturally above the ground. Besides you and the door, everything is drowned in absolute, limitless darkness.
It makes you think of a very late winter night, just after it had finished raining. Quiet and wet, without a soul in sight.
It calls to mind a scene of heading back home after a hard day at school or work, and at long last enjoying some peace. The scenery was just as if it came out from those moments, between happiness and happiness, peace and peace, where the anxiety could make you feel sick.

You seem a little confused.
You start walking around the door, but always keep it in the edge of your view, never stray from it too far, almost like you're bound to it by rope. As if it's a way to ensure it doesn't suddenly vanish behind your back. You're taking safety measures, is all. Or is it just cowardice?

But nothing out of the ordinary happens. The landscape doesn't change, and there is no movement around you— only that of your own body.
Relieved, or maybe seeking some change, you dare to walk farther.

In this darkness, without any landmark to help you maintain your sense of direction, you decide to use the door as a reference point, and start moving in a straight line from there. You walk on and on, your shoes becoming caked with mud, your braids swinging slowly back and forth.

At your feet, you can see puddles from time to time. It really must have rained recently, then. You calmly walk on without minding the mud that soaks through your socks and dirties your feet.

The puddles swirl— a hint at something deeper, as if they held the secrets of

your future.
Like that beautiful and clear surface, promising happiness and success.
Or that muddy one, bearing a dark omen of hardship and weariness.

Anyone would say that stepping on a puddle is unpleasant. Everyone knows that bacteria and maggots overflow in muddy water, and the inside of your shoes becomes sopping wet, too. It can be seen as an invitation of poor fortune. At least if the water was clear, you could pose the idea as something optimistic, like cleansing your own heart.

As if still trying to determine your destiny, the puddle's surface keeps on changing, from clear to muddy, from muddy to clear. In the rippling reflection, you can see a heavy cloud, like the one that hung in the sky above that small room's balcony, swallowing up the moon's shine with a malicious sort of glee.

Heedlessly, you step over the puddles. Each time you do it, your body's reflection is cast on the water. With every step, ripples appear on the surface, warping the image. Even after you leave the puddle behind, those ripples remain, creating eerie distortions.

Your reflection becomes deformed, as if it were made out of modelling clay, and reshapes itself into a couple of well-dressed adults. They walk on by without looking at you, just glaring at each other, like a couple in the middle of a fight.

That distorted image of you, the couple that was made from you, keeps cursing and spitting at each other.
But you don't notice at all.

You don't see. You don't feel. You are not aware.
But, well, that's just the way you are…

They look like an intimate married couple. One where the closeness allows them to quarrel without needing to hold anything back. Each time the ripples spread, they distort further and further. Until their flabby limbs stretch and their faces crumble, making them look like monsters.
But you do not look at them, and keep walking, farther and farther away.

The water's surface, like a mirror, reflects all things equally. In truth, the other side of the mirror is a different world altogether. But feigning ignorance, simply by closing your eyes and not listening to anything, you keep going on.

When was it that humans started to look in the mirror? It’s a curious thing to think about. What first made them fuss over things like their hairstyle and the texture of their skin, leading them to create cosmetics and cover their faces with balms and creams? They look at themselves and think, oh, there’s something I’m missing, oh, there’s something I wish I could lose. And they think of ways they could fix those things. And as those faults pile up and up, people go about transforming themselves into something else.

At times it is an act born of deep contemplation, and at times it is a bold yet rashly-made choice. Sometimes it is not their own decision to make at all.

But regardless of the outcome, it is thanks to looking in the mirror that those people are able to view themselves from outside.

You don’t do that, though.

You walk quickly, pretending not to see yourself. But something near your feet suddenly catches your eye, leading your steps to grind to a halt.
Curious, you brush the hair out of your eyes and crouch down to get a closer look at the thing you very nearly tripped over.

It is a small umbrella.

Against the dreary, rain-soaked backdrop, the red color of the umbrella stands out quite a bit. You pick it up without hesitation, and determinedly open it.

Granted, the time to open an umbrella would be when it’s raining, making the action seem laughably pointless. Yet, as if the laws of cause and effect were reversed— as if you were Alice in the world on the other side of the looking glass— without warning, it begins pouring rain.

The rain comes down with a thunderous force, as if it wanted to strike something down.

You hold the umbrella closer to your body in attempt to avoid getting wet.

Rain is a symbol of blessing. It falls from the sky like tears. Tears absorb sadness like a sponge, and then escort that sadness outside of the body. They serve a positive function— almost like their purpose was to brighten your future.

And in this downpour, the puddle at your feet is like a lump of anxiety, rapidly expanding until it overflows, and then finally becoming blurred, images fading, dissolving. The couple that was inside, along with their unsightly, meaningless quarrel, melt away under the ripples.

You continue heading down the path you decided on, without a clue as to where you’re headed, or any worries as to what you’ll find once you’re there. Any uneasiness is buried deep within your chest, as you lightly twirl the handle of the umbrella between your hands.

With no one to hear, you hum a cheerful tune.

Chapter 4: A straight road

Like that, you keep walking.

In the rain, you must look like a child whose parents went to pick her up after school on a winter day, happily skipping down the pavement with her hands held between each of their own.

Maybe rain isn't such an unpleasant thing for you.

But, instead of your parents walking at your side, there's no one. Completely alone, you keep walking in this empty darkness, as if trying to push aside the continuously falling rain.

In the growing puddles fed by the rain, the quarrelling couple has almost dissolved, but even though they are losing their shape and melting into the mud, they keep on fighting and hating each other. That's okay, though; the sound made by the splatter of raindrops against your umbrella protects you. The couple's quarrel never reached you in the first place. Besides the falling rain, it's awfully quiet around you.

You continue to walkleisurely, until coming to a halt before what seems to be a stairwell.
The awfully tall and narrow entrance protrudes unnaturally from the ground. From there, the stairs go down, connecting to a place you don't know. Bored of your aimless wandering, you head straight into it, probably expecting something.

Though you close the umbrella, you can hear the rain continue to fall behind you with a soft pitter-patter. You begin climbing down the stairs, as if drawn inside by an unseen force.

You shake the water out of your wet braids, and you continue your descent down the staircase that has become wet and slippery. It's dark, and you can't see a thing. You don't know what awaits you at the end of the stairs.

You go down, down, down. In the distance, you can just about make out the

tiniest of lights. You head towards it, and the light grows and grows, until you've reached the exit.

You are welcomed by a forest, so dense that it looks like a sea of trees.
Even though you climbed down a staircase, you're clearly outside. It makes no sense, but you don't seem affected by the bizarreness of it. You glance around you with curiosity.

Greenery surrounds you, endlessly, hiding what may lay beyond. The trees block your view, but they look lifeless. There's no clear path among the maze of trees, but suddenly, you drop your umbrella upon seeing something that, even to you, looks jarringly out of place.

In front of you stands a vending machine.

Like a bug drawn to the light, you approach it. It looks like a brand new, but otherwise perfectly mundane vending machine. There's coffee, tea and juice lined up, but nothing that particularly stands out. You press your face close to the glass, like a kid in front of a candy shop, to get a better look at the selection.

You look for some change in your pocket, and when your search yields nothing but lint, you shake your head with a disappointed sigh.
Perhaps this is intended to be the equivalent of a game's hero picking up a potion to reinvigorate his senses and quench his thirst. But since that option is blocked for you, you can only raise your hand to your dry throat and hope to moisten it by gulping.

Though regrettable, you ultimately have no choice but to give up and step back from the machine. The ground beneath your feet is uneven and rough, but somehow it proves no problem for you at all as you continue walking.

After checking every nook and crack between the tress, you finally see one big enough for your small body to go through.
Once you manage to reach the other side, a path is revealed to you.

It's an asphalt road, but it doesn't look transited. There are cracks running through it, and plants sprouting from them. Without any car passing through, it resembles the decaying corpse of a massive beast.

You step onto the asphalt and look around.

This straight road cuts through the ocean of trees, seemingly endless. As ever, there's no way of telling where it leads, or where it began. But it only feels natural to go down the road, so you do just that.

Your walking steps resound on the asphalt.

The road is long, the end out of sight, like a highway without any car to be seen. Walking through it is not easy.

You walk and walk, on and on. The asphalt sprawls boundlessly beneath your feet, unchanging, and you grow sick and tired of walking. You're coming to realize that you will never get anywhere like this. This highway is a closed space.

And then you notice—
On one edge of the road, just in the corner of your vision, there's something weird.
It stands there, almost like it's floating, calling no attention to itself and easily blending into its surroundings. It's no wonder you didn't see it at first. Actually, how long has it been there?

The white lines drawn across the road have an almost hypnotic effect when you look at them. It's known to be the cause behind some instances of drivers falling asleep at the wheel, even. And by walking for so long and keeping your eyes fixed on the ground, you lost your awareness in the same fashion.

But now that you've noticed the thing, you can't ignore it any more. Something about it fills you with a sense of unease.
No matter how you look at it, you can't make sense of it. It's a perplexing being. You thought it looked human at first, but the impression only lasted a split-second. It's about as tall as you, and could be mistaken for someone covering their body with a raincoat. With the dim hope you might meet someone else after all, you begin to approach it, until you're close enough to make out what it is.

It's not human. If anything, it looks like a jellyfish.
A jellyfish the size of a human being.

Through its skin that's translucent like a plastic bag, you can clearly see the blood flowing inside its internal organs, with that almost-human shape. It's almost enough to make you sick. The large intestine, the small intestine, and all

the other organs hang in front of you, floating in blood. And the thing just stands there, not even acknowledging your presence, if it even can.

Scared and more than a little queasy, you step away from it, and then turn around, running back in the direction from which you came.

The road seems to stretch on infinitely before you. Somewhere in the distance, a bell rings, like for the memorial service at a funeral. As if hinting to your own end as a bloody corpse at a side of the road. It sounds only once. For sympathy.

And you’re running away again, hands covering your ears.

Chapter 5: Traffic Light

You're dreaming. A never ending nightmare. You, running away from the sickening being showing its organs, go back through the road you came from. By doing that, at least you'll be surrounded by the landscape you were becoming used to. You'll find some relief. Or so it should have been.

Before you know it, you're walking through an unknown place. You were supposed to be going back through an straight road without any forks. Going by common sense, this should be impossible. The road under your feet is unchanged, but the trees that grew all around you have disappeared. Your eyes can see an unending darkness, interrupted only by raindrops.

Puzzled, looking around, you gaze at the strange things floating over your head. They look like big crosses. A symbol of sin… but also a symbol of atonement and redemption. If you believe, you will be saved. So, going back to the road was surely the right choice. Without a doubt, getting away from that disgusting organ thing was the right decision.

Your walking pace has become rhythmical, as if you were trying to push yourself forward. After all, for beings that came to save you, they look quite ominous. As if they were standing over a gravestone, with the putrid smell of a corpse lingering in the air.

The crosses rise in frequency, but by no means they get closer to you, and their saving help is nowhere to be seen. The crosses have now grown eyes, and follow your every movement persistently. They look at you, and nothing more. Being in their gaze gives you an indescribable feeling of oppression, and you increase your pace while still going straight ahead, as if trying to shake something off you.

The crosses keep increasing in number, and their gazes multiply with them. To add oil to fire, looking close to them, you realize that they have some kind of raw sexual aura to them. In short, they look like genitals. Even though they were saving symbols just a few moments ago, in some unpleasant way, they have become something that you would definitely never seek help from.

The road goes on endlessly, and the crosses looking at you keep increasing in number. Like when Jesus Christ climbed the hill of Golgota, no one has come to your aid, and the view around you seems to be scorning you with vulgar gossips no matter where you look.

You can’t bear this for so long.

Without thinking of how far you’ve walked, you suddenly stop, turn on your heels, and start walking back. The image of someone going forth and back… is the image of someone lost. You ignore all the malice and spite surrounding you, and walk with your eyes fixated on the road. Before long, the road stops, and the sea of trees is, once again, before your eyes.

Forest are well known for suicides. With its trees, bugs, wild birds and many other animals living in them, they should be a cauldron of life… but the shadow and stench of dead lingers in them. Leaving the city, civilization, and in a place where living beings are not armored by common sense, those people that are too weak seek to end their lives. If you were to die here, you would melt in a huge whirlpool of life, and after devouring every bit of you away, there would be nothing left.

As if you were seeking exactly that, as if you were an applicant for suiciding, you start roaming around while breathing heavily. The forest becomes increasingly stepped, and the thin path make it even harder to go on. At some point of the road, the red and yellow lights indicating “Stop” or “Danger” from a traffic light can be seen in the distance. As if to advert your eyes from everything, you open your umbrella and cling strongly to it. Amidst the falling rain, you allow yourself to feel some reassurance and take a breath. And you suddenly notice.

There was something laying in front of you. And that something was a dead body. It’s lying there, facing the floor, over the puddle of its own blood. As if it was ran over, the corpse was smashed flat. There was almost nothing left that you could identify as limbs or head, making it hard to recognize it as a human corpse the more you looked at it… but, of course, you couldn’t decide to mess with it any further looking for anything. It was already badly decaying, and its skin was of a poisonous green. While maggots had already bitten and teared his skin, it was still possible to see he used to be an adult male, now filled with holes. The mud on the rooting corpse, mixing with the rain, changes and blurs

the color of his clothes and hair, that wave without resistance.

There was also a ran over frog. That exactly is the first vivid experience with dead for most children living in rural areas. The limbs of a frog are quite similar to a person's, and it's organs are arranged in a similar way. That's the reason why they are so often used as the subject for dissections… and end up meeting such violent deaths.

It may be an effect of the pouring rain, but there is barely any odor here. You frown, put your umbrella over your shoulder, and squat besides the corpse. And down there, as if you impulsively wanted to say something, you opened and closed your mouth without making a sound. Desperately. As if you were trying to bear with a headache. Or as if you were trying to make a confession.

In the real world, you can never meet again the dead. You won't meet them by the street, and never meet their gaze again. That's why, when you meet one in a dream, it usually means you were really attached to them, keep a feeling of guilt, or had some other kind of deep relation with them.

You're there, immobile. In a sense, seeing a corpse is like ascertaining that all humans will someday undoubtedly die. Life always ends in dead. Without exception, a bad end awaits everyone. What you are facing now is suggesting such an ominous future.

The corpse, of course, showed no reaction. The only sound that could be heard was that of the air coming and going from your lips. As if you were hiding something deep inside you, and wanted to finally let it go… but in the end you stop and leave it in the depths of your heart. With your teeth clenched, as if something was trying to get out. But as if, in the end, it was stopped on its way.

The traffic light shakes over your head, worn out by the weather, and suddenly falls. Right on you. You can't react, and over the weird sound that could be heard, you are only given enough time to look upwards… In a kinda comedic way, the traffic light makes a direct hit on your head. With the last electric spurts, the traffic lights blink in green and red before shutting down for the last time.

Chapter 6: The red thread

A… Are you all right?

The traffic light fell from quite high, and hit you directly on the head. Normally, you'd be dead. But you're dreaming. Since it's a dream, it's all right. There's no problem. As if to ascertain that, you're completely calm. What fell on you was a crosswalk traffic light. The red and green lights, meaning "Stop" and "Continue", vertically arranged… quite a common sight.

The moment the traffic light crashed on you, it mysteriously grew and swelled… and now hides most of your body. As a full body costume would. Your feet sticked out of the bottom. Your shape is that of a mysterious creature, a living traffic light that runs around unsteadily. You seem amused by the possibility of, by some unknown means, being able to change the lights from green to red and back, and are having fun in doing so. Just like a little child playing with a new toy.

There's no way you can see anything with that, but without any kind of hesitation, while still switching the "advance" and "stop" lights on and off, you start to walk away from the dead body. Without any other expression other than "Yes" or "No". Just like a baby. The image of pure innocence. And with that traffic light covering your whole body, you keep walking ahead with those short steps. You really are unable to see anything ahead of you. You just walked over the side street you were walking alongside up until now. You walk in a sort of confident way… that of someone that can't see ahead, and therefore, can't see anything to fear. But that's dangerous.

Just in front of you, at your feet, opens a manhole. A wide open pit. It's no good. If you keep going that way, you'll fall. But since you can't see anything, you don't have any sense of danger, and there's no one close to warn you. But even more, just under your tottering steps, a red, snake like thing is coiled around. It comes out from the manhole, like a plant or some kind of thread. With an unnatural movement, that thing entangles your feet, makes you lose your balance, and you fall.

And just like that… you're going down into the manhole. Further below. Deeper. To even a more farther place. But suddenly reach the bottom.

Luckily, it seems it wasn't such a deep hole. Certainly, not more than falling from a jungle gym. But that was enough to make a crack in the traffic light, and that crack rapidly spreads. From its depths, your face shows a shocked expression.

It seems like the traffic light absorbed most of the impact, and you are completely unharmed. Without even a feeling of pain, you stand up almost immediately. Looking at the fragments of the street light, you shake the dirt of your skirt with your hands. With your recovered sight, you can see the fragments of the street light disappear, just like the fragments of a fleeting dream (what an allegory).

Then you raise your head… and what a sight.

A gigantic face is looking down upon you. In some way, it resembled an octopus, with an obscene shape evoking the image of something fishy. What entangled your feet before was a thread sharing the color of blood and the bright red color of the face. A giant smeared in blood. And with those eerie red threads still hanging in the air, it followed you with its vulgar sight.

Your unarranged skirt exposing your thighs, your swelling breasts… As if you finally noticed its eyesight on those, you start covering your body with your hands. But those red threads around you keep wriggling, as if they desired you. A huge, red hand begins to approach you. Slowly, as if it wanted take away your very soul. In complete denial, you shake your head and run away. But, as if it wanted to ascertain your scape was certain, the red thread begins to crawl in front of your very eyes. While you hesitate a little, you grab one of the ends of the thread. And, twisting in an unpleasant way, it begins to ascend. Unable to control it, doing unseemly things. Or so it seems, but while trying to bear with this incredibly unpleasant feeling, you cling to it.

You climb the red thread. Your chest, your thighs, your nape,… the red thread coils around you in a lascivious way. At the top you can see a hole, and the thread seems to be tied to something at the other side. It's really small, almost like hope itself, a way out of this hellish scenery. Thinking about that to aid you, and with no other option but to resign, you keep your way up the blood thread.

Like the sinner clinging to the spider thread over hell. But what… just what could be that sin you've committed?

Your figure, trying to reach the light, reminds of courage itself, of someone that wants to live, someone that wants to be happy. The proof to the gods that you haven't given up yet. Completely out of breath, and with only the strength of your thin, girly arms to support you during this climb, you finally reach the summit. Your head comes out of the hole, and then, supporting you with both hands, you get your body out of there.

You put your hand over your chest for a while, like someone that just ate something unpleasant and was about to throw out. And then you see the landscape around you has changed once again.

When thinking of the sea of trees or the highway, they looked like places you could have found in the real world. But this place was different. As if you'd entered a different dimension, as if you had reached bizarre space. As if a small kid had scribbled with a pencil over a pure white paper, letting his hand be driven by pure instinct. That's the kind of space this was. A mostly white, vast extension, and every here and there, a few, slim lines would draw strange and unfamiliar shapes.

One of those looked like the head of a male adult.

The place where the red thread was curling up until now has become a completely flat surface… That head is actually looking at you with urge. With bloodshot eyes. Now it's raining, so as if that was the reason, you open your umbrella and cover yourself with it. You cover your whole self. Trying to at least protect yourself from those glaring eyes.

Just like that, avoiding the gaze of the head, you surround it… and find an entrance, that you enter quite cautiously. As if you didn't want to stay in this place any longer. Going around the head gave you an unpleasant feeling, but there was no other entrance or exit. There was no other choice.

You strengthen your grip around the umbrella's handle and go to even further depths.

Chapter 7: Diary

Suddenly, everything around you changes. You dive into an even deeper dream.

You're walking over a cloud. As one would in a fairy tale. A cloud road surrounded by the most absolute darkness, crossing the sky. It also evokes the image of ascending to heaven, like dancing, in an state of euphoria. But when thinking about ascending to heaven, the image of death also comes to mind. You seem to be having fun, but for some reason, a feeling of uneasiness lingers, and when you look closely at the cloud under your feet, it looks like it's becoming stiff and dark, as if revealing its true nature. It wasn't your real intention, but you seem to have reached quite a height… To someone that wasn't cautious enough, this could look like happiness itself. As if forced to bring out a smile. Just as if a mischievous comfort surrounded you.

Above is another gigantic creature. Something disgusting that looked just like a man driven mad by lust and pleasure. Looking at you like a boy that looks at his toy box and finds a little doll ready to play with, and break it apart, it reaches his hand out to you, ready to do as it pleases. As if you wanted to escape from that, you start to run. Your field of vision opens abruptly. You stand still at the end of this deep darkness.

Over there, a huge animal. At a glance, it's a fearsome beast. Strong constitution, a coercive glare as if it wanted to highlight its violent nature, marked blood vessels, sharps claws and fangs… and unable to vent its anger, this creature is grinding its teeth in rage. A blob of anger and frustration, like that of a man that hates the world after being unable to vent his lust. That symbolic monster is glaring at you, and growling as if ready to attack you any moment. Making a sound with its sharp, carnivorous teeth grinding against each other. An endless, annoying noise.

Disliking it, you cover your ears and step back. And at the same time, you seem to realize. The only one grinding their teeth there… is actually you. Irritated, angry, trying to release some stress… this animal is you. The violent part of yourself that you weren't able to vent, exploding like a bomb, here the voice of

your resentment comes out.

This monster… no, every unclear and disturbing landscapes is part of your own dream. Every ominous thing was something your mind created. The ugly things, the disgusting things, they are all crawling inside you, and you just walked up to them. You start to tremble, finally aware of all this. Shaking your head in refusal, troubled by it all, as if you didn't want to keep seeing this nightmare… you look down, defeated, grinding your teeth.

With your fingertips, as if you wanted to ascertain something, you touch your cheek. And you pinch yourself. As if you were begging to wake up if this was a dream.

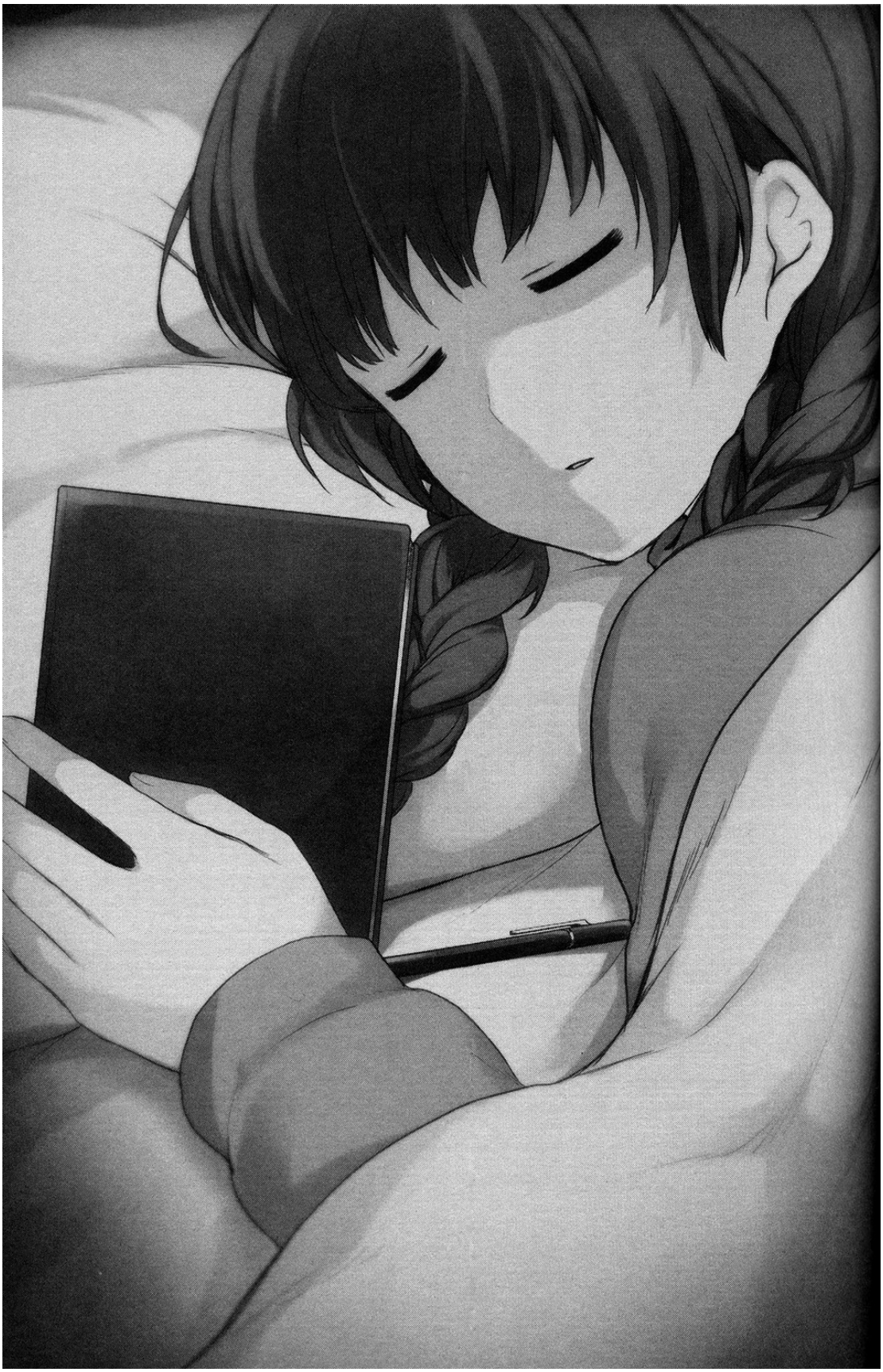
……

And then you wake up on your bed. Taking away the blanket that covered up to your head, you take a deep breath, as someone that just came out from underwater. Your face and your chest are completely soaked in sweat. You touch your cheek to assure that you've stopped grinding your teeth. For a short while, you're breathing heavily.

It was a dream after all, although it was obvious. You nod to yourself several times.

Without getting out of the bed, you reach your hands to your desk and lazily grab your diary. You start binding pen traces on it, turning them into characters. Diligently, as if you were in a hurry.

Dreams are things that our unconscious shows us. When you wake up, your unconscious hides deep into your self, away from your reach. That's why you forget so fast about dreams. Just like water that you were trying to hold with your hands. Trying to stop that same thing from happening, you keep writing character after character, clumsily. You write about the umbrella, about the traffic light, and about everything else. Having used all your energy, and losing once again to drowsiness, you let your head rest on the pillow.



The diary slips from your hand. You’re dreaming again.

Chapter 8: Snow storm

You’re dreaming once more.

This time, again, darkness spreads beyond your room’s door. And there, all lined up in this unnatural space, all those doors. No matter what you do, you’ll always end here in your dreams. You already know about this place, but that doesn’t make you much more confident. You open one of the doors slightly and peek inside. You feel immediately some kind of dreadful atmosphere, and fall back. You repeat this for a while.

You keep this sightseeing walk until you get interested in a particular door. It’s a door in no special place, and with quite a plain color. It doesn’t give a hostile vibration, but instead, that of a fairy tale. Staring at it full of interest, you push it open, softly, and step on the other side.

And what’s ready to meet you there is a snow blizzard.

As far as the eye can see, an unpolluted snowscape. While covered in snow, this is again quite a vast space. But unlike the other gloomy, bloody scenery, at this side of this door, the light reflecting in the snow makes everything seem at peace and joyful. Relieved by this, you start walking.

The wind leaves traces on the snow. You spread the red umbrella that you seem to have taken a liking to, and preventing the snow from blinding you, you start walking. Strangely enough, you don’t seem to feel any cold, and keep walking in quite a light way. Could it be that you can’t feel cold or heat since it’s a dream? It seems you don’t need to warm yourself.

You go on jumping, like a snow rabbit. Sometimes crouching down to make a snow ball and throwing it away without any purpose in mind. You lose balance and fall on your rear, getting all covered in snow, but you seem to be having fun and don’t care about it. With the impact, a tree’s branches wave, and the snow falling from it covers yourself entirely, making you look like a snowman. But, like a little kid would, you stay in high spirits. Like a happy dog running around in a garden, the snow makes everything look so much bright. Somehow, it feels

kinda unreal, as if the dirty and ugly things were all covered by the snow… A huge playground that fell from heaven.

Snow may look gentle and fun, but nothing further from reality. In Dante's Divina Comedia, it's something that steals warmth, that robs life, that kills everything and ruins fields. Winter is linked to dead, and in a way, shares a meaning with sleep. That's why you should stay away from here as much as possible, leaving the beautiful, unsteped scenery of white as pure and charming as you think it is. The floor covered in thick snow is surely hiding things that you wouldn't want to see. You may not realize, but it robs you of the warmth of your body and gnaws it, or rather freezes it. It's something obvious, but you are like someone that just went back to being a little kid. In this dangerous storm, you keep your cheerful gait.

Before long, in this fuzzy landscape, you meet something out of the ordinary. A little cave made with ice… in other words, an igloo. When you look at it close, you realize it's made by small, compacted blocks lined up.

In people minds there are many more things than one could ever imagine. Those things are jammed into boxes and stored in the deepths of your brain. They come with a precious wrapping and a "With my best wishes" written on it, but you can open them anytime you want.*** Just like those crystallizations of memories, these igloos seem to be made guarding important recollections, laying here and there. They all look warm, but small, like treasure boxes. You step at the entrance of one, covering yourself from the blizzard. You lower your umbrella and enter in this consciousness.

Curious, just like the match selling girl, you let yourself relax and start examining your surroundings, letting yourself go into pleasant and happy memories. But of course, you don't realize. Just like a little girl would, you are completely absorbed in your games. Falling and rolling on the floor, jumping like some animal's offspring. Hiding. Sliding on the sledge. Everything on your surrounding shines with it's own light, like a field of blooming flowers. You are showing your most sincere and happy smile. A warmth in your hands. That's the kind of security you show.

But those are just memories of a distant past. Like a snowflake that falls on your hand, all that melts away as you approach it and disappears.

As if you suddenly were conscious of the cold, and looking for new warmth, you step into the next igloo. You repeat this, recalling all those precious and nostalgic memories. You enter nonchalantly the next igloo, but stop right at the entrance.

There’s a girl already inside.

It’s really strange to find another person in a dream. When it does happen, they are either a shadow of your memories or an abstraction of an idea. I wonder which is it here. That girl is sitting down, embracing her own knees, and seems to be sound sleep. In a blink, you walk to her side, but there’s no reaction. It’s as if she’s completely buried into herself. As if she was trying to protect something, like a treasure. That girl looks like you. But somehow younger. Like a little version of yourself. A pure you that, after playing around in the pure white snow, ended up sleeping here. Trapped in her happy childhood memories. Sealed away in her sleep.

On a cold night, one gets instinctively close to a fireplace or a stove, and just like that, in a single instant, as if you wanted to warm your cold body, you curl like a fetus besides the girl.

Stop. You mustn’t wake her up. If she were to wake up, she would have to face the real world. She wouldn’t be able to live on. The bitter things, the painful and sad moments, they would mince her body into a puddle of blood. But as long as she stays asleep, she can stay in her happy and comfortable memories, to keep being a little kid… It’s better that way. You shake the girls shoulder softly with your hand.

But suddenly, you turn around as if you had felt some presence. At the entrance of the igloo, surrounded by the snowy landscape, there’s something.

It’s a small woman. Small enough to fit into your hands. She wore what looked like pure white Japanese burial clothes. Her mysterious blue hair made it clear that she wasn’t human. She looked just like a doll one would use to play house.

You tilt your head slightly, as in doubt, and approach her. You reach your hand out to her, slowly, as if you were trying to pick up that surreal fairy. But the blue haired doll avoids your fingers easily, and starts running away, as if frightened by you. You start chasing her. In the middle of the blizzard, you reach out with both hands to her, that can’t run that fast, and press her against your chest, embracing her.

The doll doesn’t resist you at all. You won’t let her go, just like a kid, unable to let go a blanket with their own scent. Even when they become adults, and it ends in the storeroom, they wont throw it away. And if someone carelessly buys them a new one and throws the old one away, they will feel sad. The doll was like the crystallization of that pure feeling of love and affection one feels as a kid for her friends, and evoked such fun memories. You were embracing all that.

You came a long way chasing her, and the igloos were no longer visible. Your ragged, white breath made your fatigue obvious. In the palm of your hand, the doll is slowly crumbling. Like the Snow Woman that melts away after receiving the love of men. As if the warmth of your body after running turned her into water, cooling you. Relaxing you.

But even after having disappeared, the doll has left something important behind… something that gave you courage and refreshed you. You embrace the remains of your little friend as something precious to you.

Chapter 9: Bed

You stand there, without moving, for a while.

As you stand there, embracing the remains of that little doll, like a child, in the middle of the snowy landscape, the snow starts wetting your skirt. But you don’t move, as if you intended to be buried by the falling snow. And finally you notice at the corner of your eye.

You can barely see it, but there’s an igloo. As if seeking its warmth, accepting its tempting invitation, you start walking. Unaware.

In the place where you were until now, there were a lot of igloos together, as if they were a flock of birds getting together, trying to keep each other warm in a cold day. But this one was alone there, isolated, far from any other igloo. If the igloos were the crystallization of your fun memories as a child, this one that’s so far must mean there’s something you don’t want to remember there.

It was an unpleasant situation, but there were no other igloos on sight, so you keep advancing vigilantly. You didn’t know what kind of sadness or grief was awaiting you there. You suddenly stop on your feet. From deep inside the igloo you were approaching, there’s a face peeking at you.

From the moment you see it, you know you'll hate it. It doesn't match the beautiful and snowy landscape at all with. It's ugly and unpleasant. You falter and decide to go back. In front of your eyes, something comes out of the igloo, poisoning the snowy landscape, polluting it with its footsteps, walking as if it owned the place.

In a way, it looks like a woman. A graceful, well-bred woman. She wears a gaudy dress and her hair is beautifully arranged. She looks quite refined… But her face is grotesque. She has huge eyes, but with tiny pupils, like a carnivorous bird; a long and pointy nose, like that of a witch; and when you look closely at it, her dress has poisonous feeling about it, like a wasp's or a spiders colors, meant to warn predators of their venom. She mustn't get close to you. It's dangerous, evil. That's the feeling you get from that ominous woman.

In a way, her height reminded of that of an adult's. Apparently, that woman doesn't have any particular interest in you, that keep your slow retreat, and she keeps walking without a care. It was almost as if she doesn't see you. As if she is in a completely different dimension of yours, the tall woman keeps loitering around, without taking notice of you.

Your reaction had been exaggerated. Suddenly, you start digging in the snow. Your fingers became red with frostbite, but you continued with your work without a care. After a short while, under the fallen snow, you finally manage to find the street light you remember so well. The one you found on that highway, fell on you, and became a part of you.

Why is such a thing here, buried in the snow? How did you know that digging there would bring it out? It's a mystery, but as if you had a theory yourself, you don't seem to be surprised at all by this. You embrace the traffic light with your shivering arms, and then put it on from the hole under it. Like a full body costume. And you look used to it, like someone that puts on her uniform everyday. You change the light to red, as if you were requesting to the tall woman walking around absentmindedly to "stop". The woman sees that, and she stops as if she was in a comedy routine. She stands still, or rather, she is completely paralyzed. She has one feet up, ready to take the next step forward, but doesn't move at all. Her fingers and her hair were still too.

You had put on the street light and projected a strong feeling of rejection. Stop.

Don’t move. Don’t get close. No. Negative. You’re wrong… With those feelings, you project the red light, and while being careful of not turning around with that street light you are wearing, you start to run away as fast as you can. Of course, not looking ahead makes it hard to walk over the snow, and you trip, falling down clumsily. As you fall down, with a perfect synchronization, the street light cracks, and you come rolling out from it.

Since the street light is broken, the tall woman begins to move again. You run away in fear, frantic, without even looking back. And then, you see something completely unnatural in front of you.

It appeared without warning from amidst the blizzard. It’s something that shouldn’t be here, in this white landscape. A bed. A plain and simple bed. What’s more, the snow didn’t pile on it, as if it was somehow warm. You run to it without losing a second and get the blanket over your head.

You cuddle, and shiver. As if you had seen some horror movie. Or as if your parents had scolded you and you were reluctantly to sleep. You closed your eyes strongly, as if you were trying to force yourself to sleep, curling under the blanket.

Falling asleep when you’re already dreaming. Finding a bed deep into your bed. Falling deeper, closer to the core, as if you were sinking into the sea depths. While you do that, the tall woman keeps walking around aimlessly outside the bed. Like an overprotective parent checking if the noisy kid is asleep. With her awfully disgusting eyes rolling constantly. Looking into the bed, as if she meant to pour an awful curse on you if you were to show the most little sign of being awake. The woman is not going away. She just keeps walking around endlessly.

Sleeping is your scape route. Running away and closing your eyes in front of what you don’t want to see. But there’s a fundamental difference here. A family you hate, a workplace or school you hate… you have to face those again as soon as you wake up. Reality is always right there, waiting for you, no matter how deep you try to go in your sleep. Of course, sleeping is not gonna fix anything. The woman keeps walking around you purposelessly but tirelessly. Without a shred of affection nor love, checking if you make any reaction inside the bed, with her endless observation. Ready to strike a cockroach as it appears, to pull off a hair with splits ends… as soon as, maybe out of discomfort, you move, even if only slightly.

You just want desperately to get away from that unpleasant tall woman. But hiding is not gonna help you. You start searching under the blankets for something that may help you, taking care that the tall woman doesn't notice. And there is something.

It's the small doll with blue hair that you thought had disappeared just a while back. Like a restless kid in bed, you embrace that carefully. You press her against your chest, and with a smile on her face, she disappears. Usually, it's hard to see under the blankets, but who hasn't light a flashlight and played as if the ruler of their own little kingdom? In such a dim light, you see the doll become a set of changing clothes.

At some point, all girls forget about dolls and start to care about their clothes. Dressing up fashionable, taking care of makeup…… and by doing so they become dolls themselves. With that, girls turn into women, and seal their memories deep into their dreams.

You change under the blanket. In a sense, it's like someone that tries to stay warm while changing into their uniforms on a cold morning. Holding for a little longer the need to face reality, and lingering under the blanket of dreams. As soon as you finish changing, you come out of the blanket.

Looking at you, it's hard to tell you apart from the doll. The burial clothes. Your hair, with that blue color. It was a perfect imitation. Every woman has sometime wanted to change into the clothes of a doll they loved as little girls.

You look only once at the tall woman. But she doesn't seem to care at all about adults or dolls. Uninterested, she turns away and leaves somewhere else.

You let out a sight of relief, and turn towards the igloo you were aiming for earlier. You were strongly dragged to it. The tall woman is far away now, so you enter calmly into it.

It's clearly different from any other igloo you've seen. In the floor, there is a spring. It was a small puddle, the size of one you'd use to rinse your face every morning. It has a strange hue, like that of a thick lotion or face cream. Everyone rinses their faces when starting to face reality in the morning. Then, adult girls turn to makeup.

While thinking about all this, you sink your fingers into the spring.

Somewhere, the tall woman’s scorning laugh echoes full of contempt.

Chapter 10: Who are you?

You wash your face.

Suddenly, you're aware that the scenery around you has completely changed. You're in some watery place, as if all the snow around you had melted away. The cold water reaches up to your ankles, getting into your shoes. As far as the eye can see, this is a place where a small kid would happily play splashing water everywhere. Even with the water that up, you walk happily. The water splashes, and while it's kinda hard to walk, you move graciously, almost dancing.

Water is life itself. Everyone's body, and even corpses, are mainly made of water. It's the thing you need the most to live, so everyone seeks water instinctively. If you let yourself sink in the warm water of a bath, up to your shoulders, you'd reach peace of mind. You'd relax. In this calm mood, a bright smile arises on your face.

The water is crystal clear, and nothing obstructs your view. It resembles a southern shoal, with clear sand, like a jewel paved road. It draws a unique pattern under your feet, like that of skin's photo zoomed in.

Like a kid's skin covered in sweat after playing around for long, hugging a friend… It gave that feeling of not at all unpleasant dampness. You wipe the drops of water jumping to your face with the back of your hand.

The gentle light reflects on the water's surface, illuminating you. At some point, you had stopped wearing the burial clothes you wore up until before you washed your face, and wore now your usual clothes. Your hair is tidily tied, and your braids bounce cheerfully as you walk. You're walking on a wonderful scenery, like that of a fairy tale, like the world a happy child sees, a magical world of sorts. The water lever is low clear, cleaning your very soul.

Around you, there is a rocky, fragile area, as if it was made of sugar. It's a pure white platform. You reach a place where you can easily climb it, reluctantly step up and shake your head strongly, getting the water off you. You squeeze your braids too. Move away the bangs sticking to your forehead, you take a look

around.

This area is somewhat complicated. It looks mostly like a maze. The terrain is shaped in strange ways, in a way that makes walking through here without thinking quite tedious. Even if you wanted just to play around, you'd find a lot of limitations, and this feeling of being blocked was quite frustrating. While you're at a loss, gazing over the overly complicated structure of this place, you notice something hanging at your side. It's a thread. Actually, a balloon. The kind that kids love, with bright colors and a thread hanging from them.

Like any child would, you grasp its thread tightly. And just as you do that, your feet lift off the ground lightly.

You're completely floating, disregarding the laws of physics. You become slightly confused as the balloon guides you to even greater heights. You're escaping from that grotesque maze like structure, flying away from it. You are being taken away.

The balloon begins to flicker unsteadily, becoming unreliable as it keeps going higher. You're being led by the wind around you, but as long as you don't let go, the balloon keeps supporting you. It protects you, it gives you strength, covers for you, and in a way, makes you go forward… In a sense, it's like friendship.

The hesitation from not knowing what to do makes you release the thread, even if only slightly. Before you can even notice, the balloon deflates and loses it's air. But just as that's happening, a new balloon appears right besides you. You grab this new balloon. As the years go by, your friends will pass by and change. Just like friendship goes away, as the love withers, you part with those balloons. But no matter where you put your hand, there will always be a balloon there. You are betting everything on that fact.

As you keep going higher, the air grows colder. Your breath is frozen, pure white. Your breathing becomes ragged as it becomes harder to take air into your lungs. The last balloon in your hand is so small that it has lost all its buoyancy. As if you were becoming anxious, you begin to move your legs and arms, struggling. You're so high up that you can't even see the ground anymore. If you were to fall, you wouldn't come out unscratched, even if this is a dream. Like a lonely girl in search for someone that would love her, you keep looking around you, frantically.

And you find it. It’s close to you. A small, floating island. You struggle with all your might to reach there, to that patch of land that resembles the white, bothersome maze down there. But unlike there, in this place there are what looks like tents. You gather all your courage and let go the balloon, falling down.

Falling from that height, you’re unable to land properly, and fall on your ass. Since it’s a dream, it doesn’t hurt, and you just shake your head in surprise while standing up, nervously. While so high, the air becomes thin and cold. But your struggling allowed you to reach this place.

As if you were suddenly worried about your appearance, or as if you were entering some kind of solemn religious place, like a temple, you squeeze your still wet clothes and slightly arrange your hair. In front of that huge tent.

You gulp down in amazement. The tent was lovely and flashy. It was dazzling, as if a kid had filled it will all the colors he liked. Or like a little girl trying to act all grown up, trying to show off her shiny toy jewels… you walk ahead, hesitant. Like the igloos, it gave off a warm feeling, but it was clearly more extravagant. A happy feeling lingered in the air, as if there was someone pleased by being able to boast off in front of others… You are feeling kinda guilty, like an uninvited guest that arrives without warning. And you peek secretly inside the tent, stepping inside.

What you see there is a place so lovely that you could have never imagined it by looking at the tent outside. It looks as if you could become happy just by staying here, like the place where the princess of a fairytale would live. Like a room filled with all the treasures of a child raised with love. The difference with the dream landscape you’ve been walking through up until now is obvious. Just as if you’d entered the precious memories of some other person. That’s exactly what it looked like. And that may be why you don’t seem comfortable, since it’s as if you were facing a place filled with the love you seek, meant for someone else.

On the floor lays an expensive looking carpet. Walls decorated with fun and pleasant paintings. A soft and fluffy bed on one corner. A pretty arranged desk and bookshelf with happy, adventurous, lovely books neatly arranged. A place that could make your racing heart calm and heal…

You’re overwhelmed by the view of this room for a while. But finally, you notice.

Just in front of you, standing there, who knows for how long… In this small room, there's no place nor room to hide. So obviously…

"Sorry for the messy room".

I talk to you as if you were a friend that came unannounced. I start playing with a lock of hair over my shoulder.

"Let's see… do you need something from me?"

For starters, I'll go with that. You don't react for a while. But your mouth moves, as if you were trying to put your thoughts into a silent voice. You're probably wondering something like this.

Who are you?

Part 2 - Me

第二部
わたし

Chapter 11: Bystander

I am looking at you.

You stand there, fazed, in your adorably decorated room.

“Well…”

I place my hand on my chest, regulating my breathing patterns.

I tell myself to calm down.

This is a situation I have never imagined that would happen.

You and I must be having the same dream that allowed your presence. Therefore, I have thought about and rehearsed over how I should react to you when I confront you.

But I am so nervous I stutter, as if I suddenly came across a television star on the street.

“Wel-Welcome. No, wait, this isn’t a shop. Well…”

I stand in front you, who are looking back at me. Unable to articulate myself clearly, I am left helpless.

No one can really act according to his or her wishes in a dream.

“It’s cold outside, I guess. There isn’t anything here, but let’s just take a break.”

I point at the sitting mat in the corner of the room.

You remain still, uneasy, perhaps. You might be thinking of something, but it couldn’t be seen on your face. You stagger to the bookshelf beside the wall and commence your investigation.

For someone else to touch things in my room is bothering, for such intrusion is

impolite, yet I reckon that your act is an expression of intimacy for an old friend.

“The books here don’t mean anything. What is placed here…”

I have come behind you, looking over your shoulder. On the bookshelf are books with same cover. Beside the bookshelf is a framed picture of a large creature drawn adorably, resembling a whale or an elephant. Both evoke the assuring sense of being large and reliable.

To you, this place I have is a place you can unwind and rest.

You must have gotten tired from having walked around so long, with nothing to cure your fatigue.

This is why I have to tell you.

“Do you know that all of them are the dream diaries you wrote?”

Unreasonably pacing back and forth the bookshelf has turned you irascible. I take one of the books and flip it open, only to see numerous words on it conveying sophisticated connotations.

A small red umbrella, traffic lights—these are what you have originally written.

But there are other wrecked words that were written as if they were embodiments of the search for darkness—frogs, witches, traffic lights. I incline to tell myself I know the connotations of these words, yet there are also words that I could not make sense of and that I also hate—cleaver, caput, ‘eyeball-hand’.

“You record memorable words that are important to you, for dreams are extensions of the unconscious, forgotten soon after you awake from them. In such instances, only the bygones that have engraved in your psyche can be imprinted in the depths of your brain like a screen projected by a computer.”

I lay out the book to you.

And I say to you, panting, “I’ve thought about a lot of issues, for time allowed me, and rendered me bored enough to wonder why I am lost in this nightmare, and whether I can escape from it, which, I believe, is the same thing you have in

mind.”

I pick up another book, a professional-based book, which has so much missing information it seems it is written deliberately not to contain what we know. Reading it feels like going through the vague memories left by the books we have once read, so whether the information in the book is correct or wrong, our fabrication or even our distortion—we could never know.

I say, pointing at that book for awhile, and pointing back at the dream diary for awhile, “For example, street lamps have never appeared. Be it the straight road along the trees, the corpse, or even the monsters in the depths, I think they can be analyzed by Freud’s psychoanalysis of dreams.”

I sound like a child showing off to his friend the knowledge she has acquired.

My words carry passion that not even I can stand.

“The founder of psychology is its father—Freud. He said dreams are the product of the suppressed unconscious. The unconscious is the pressure, the desire, the dispute in our reality that has been suppressed and shoved and amassed into the depths of our psyche. It is the soup boiling in a pan.”

You are the monster at the end of the straight road.

You breed in your psyche the hate, the desire, and the malice that cannot be realized or dealt with. They form in the depths of your psyche the disputing monster, that is, you yourself.

When you are dreaming, you are confronting your unconscious—the monster in yourself.

When you escape and awaken from it, you only need to distract yourself. A person with no weapon of psychology would only be murdered, gobbled, and digested by the monster, eventually becoming one with it.

“Rationality is the state of suppressing our nature. Mental or psychological disorders are the result of failure to suppress that monster. It is when rationality the hero loses to the monster; it is when this wall is crushed and the monster infiltrates into reality—this is what Freud proposed. It is of course a reductionist approach, but it merits itself for being easy to understand.”

Dreams are monsters, the desires and nature we suppress. Our lives are the incessant battles of the blade, the chains, and the shield of rationality against these monsters, forcing them to subjugation.

But this is an overly sloppy proposition. It is contradictory to use a mere opposition between rationality and nature, good against evil, to explain our sophisticated psyche.

Freud generalized the monster being suppressed as lust. He believes every dream is a symbol of the penis or the sexual act, which obviously sounds far-fetched and obscene. It may prove itself true for some circumstances, but the issue here is no less simple.

For there are more than monsters in dreams.

If we explain everything with his purport, people with psychological disorders will have to be pitiable weaklings lost to monsters. And the natural solution, as vulgar as a teenager’s manga, will be to cheer him up or to make him feel stronger.

Not everyone can be cheered up or made stronger. There are always undefeatable monsters. But if we follow Freud’s theories, we would only see ourselves as cowards.

Chapter 12: Jung

I continue my explanation.

“I am more inclined to employing Jung’s theories. He was once Freud’s student, but divorced from him due to some conceptual conflicts.”

As passionate my explanation may sound, you have seemed to turned a deaf ear, putting your heart into simply looking out at the sparkling starry night beyond the window.

Bright stars foretell luck, dim stars misfortune.

You shake yourself in your gaze.

“Jung’s theories seem more to be proposed from comparing human psyches.”

To be honest, I don’t have a clear understanding of psychology, but I have worked hard in going through a lot of related information.

I did it to help you.

“If someone happens to have a gentle personality, never having crossed any lines of violence, he is in fact only expressing his first personality of gentleness. Embedded in his heart must be an exact opposing personality of extreme brutality and violence. These opposing poles of inclination are like the reality against the dream, brought forth by the distorted image in a mirror.”

Every inclination exists for its exact opposition.

This is the rule Jung deemed for first and second personalities.

What we are talking here is not an urban legend of multi-personality disorders, and although William Milligan’s story is fascinating, its exaggeration has created bias in us towards the term *personality*.

In fact, we can find the two reflective personalities, namely externality and

internality, in anyone of us.

“We present in our daily lives our first personality, and in some occasions the second. These occasions include the time when we dream, when we sob and rant, depriving us of the ability to control our personality, or when we relax ourselves in front of our close family members.”

We call a person who is normally gentle and calm *a changed person* when she throw a tantrum.

When it is, in fact, only an alternation to her second personality. This button that changed her personality might well fit the description of *a changed person*.

It was only an exactly opposite expression caused by the alternation from the externality to the internality.

“We often hear that a husband do righteous deeds in front of men, but alcohol and violence to his wife, acting outrageously for the male chauvinism he hid. Or should there be one who speak great and inspiring words on the internet, yet becomes low profile and sincere when you meet him in person. We often hear of such internet addicts.”

These people switch their personalities according to their location—from homes to outdoors, from internet to reality.

Jung has an explanation for this: they can relax at home or in front of their computers, switching to a personality different from the one they express outdoors.

But this is by no means a sickness.

Everyone possesses the second personality, the opposition of the first. It sounds like a kind of physical law, where there must be a reaction when there is a force. In this sense, Jung has scientifically examined the sophisticated and ambiguous human psyche, building up a theory that could express the laws of psyches with chemical signs.

“Generally speaking, these two personalities balance each other and remain stable. If the balance is lost, we see *a changed person*. Like an overturned ship, the interior personality is revealed.”

But this is not a psychological disorder, for it might happen on anyone. We bear emotions, our psyches exhibiting fluctuations that balances itself throughout the day, changing like a Reversi game.

A sudden temper might only be the rare expression of the interior personality.

The real problem is original personality's inability to recover when it has been overturned. Interior personalities are, basically, all trouble makers in our lives: irascibleness, atrocity, inability to communicate, insidiousness, obscenity, and the list goes on.

Should these personalities keep surfacing, they would wreck havoc in our society.

If someone else notices the aberrance in that person, he can make him receive treatment and return to normal by flipping over his alternated personality once again.

Even if he doesn't return normal, he can eventually adapt to his alternated personality, for sometimes his other personality might even be brighter, easier to approach, and lovable. The only drawback, however, for others, is that he may not occur to be the same person any longer. This *changed person* looks the same, but he isn't the man the others knew of him.

Anyway, this example of personality alternation may mislead one to consider this a result of a psychological disorder, but its weaker version is happening every day in our lives. The excessiveness that could tip off our psyche and alternate our personalities are realized only because of the trouble it makes.

We ought only to maintain our balance, keeping caution not to let our personalities alternate. If we fail to do so by ourselves, we could seek help from a doctor or those around us.

Be that as it may, both our exterior and interior personalities are constituents of ourselves, so it is difficult to determine whether we are balanced. Psyches are invisible to the eyes. Difficult it is already to diagnose a skin disease or a tooth decay that catches such attention, more it is for something that doesn't.

As such, we fail to manage even our own condition.

We don’t even know whether we are sick.

“But there’s still a crevice through which you can pry through into your interior personality, and this crevice is your dreams.”

Deciding to cut to the chase, I titled my body frontwards.

And you just stood there, fazed.

“Human psyches can be divided roughly into the conscious and the unconscious. The exteriority is the conscious connected to reality. But in our psyches lie the unconscious, and there our second personality lingers. It records our memories and our experiences, and then symbolizes them. These symbols of unconscious can be pried into through a crevice, that is, our dreams.”

You are in a dream.

In other words, you are in your unconscious.

“Our conscious cannot work forever. It needs rest, and hence sleep, letting our body and our minds recuperate. Then we dream, where our conscious is replaced by our unconscious. Now you are in your psyche, your unconscious being the protagonist, lingering and pacing. Only when your conscious rest does the unconscious draw stories, that is, our dreams.”

This is where we are.

Memories and emotions are all symbolized in your dreams. Some of them remarkable enough to imprint a strong impression—a small red umbrella, traffic lights, and all sorts of other vibrant symbols that cause minute effects to your unconscious.

They are the sources for the changes of the unconscious.

We can call them *effects*, for they *affect* our unconscious.

You must collect these symbols in our unconscious, deciphering them to make peace in your psyche. Act like anyone else in her dreams: compromise to your psyche, float around in the unconscious to your heart’s pleasure, and you will heal the pain within.

Finally, you must come back to reality.

When you have satisfied yourself, having understood and made peace to your psyche, you must wake from your dream.

Otherwise, your reality will crumble.

Your conscious won’t be saved, and never will you be able to return to reality.

You should never let your unconscious drag you around and manipulate you.

The conscious is the connection to the real world. You must wake it up and face reality, for that is the way to live a normal life, and I hope you can.

However cruel your reality may be, an overturned ship still has to navigate in the sea of reality.

I have made such determination to speak to you such emphatic words.

Yet you remain silent, eyeing at me tenaciously.

Chapter 13: The unconscious

You are eyeing at me.

Your silence startles me.

“W-What’s wrong?”

While I am still in my suspicion, you slowly open your small red umbrella, as if you want to block my view.

“Woagh.”

Your abruptness shocked me, throwing me to the floor.

And at the same time, despite being in a room, it started to rain. This is inconceivable, but I cannot be freaked out by any aberrance in a dream. Raindrops fall on my face. Afraid of letting the book I have opened become wet, I quickly close it.

And then I look up at you.

“In reality, you open an umbrella when it rains. That is the world of the conscious. But here, it rains because you open an umbrella. Cause and effect are reversed. *This is like Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, the love-letter-like story Lewis Carroll wrote to the young girl Alice. It contains important revelations, for Alice’s adventures are stories of dreams.”

When logic is overturned, and when cause and effect are reversed.

It is a dream.

You can argue that it is logical though, for *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* agrees with Jung’s psychological point of view.

“Grumble.”

Suddenly I am unable to move.

I am stunned upon hearing a strange sound.

I can only see you cover your whole body, from head to toe, with that signaler. At the same moment, the rain became heavy, soaking up the entire room. The weight of the rainwater pulled down the picture frame from the wall; the bed is wet; the floor flooded.

Fooling around, you flash that signaler, open and close, as though they meant ‘go’ and ‘stop’.

Because of this, I am intermittently rendered able and unable to move, without a sign of stopping. Even so, in such a condition between paralysis and freedom, I continue talking to you, my speech chopped in bits, “L-Look. The *effect* will affect the dream, sure, but only the details. The signaler means something, you know? Anyone living in a modern society is educated that red means *stop*, and green *go*. Is this an expression of your acceptance or denial, or is it common sense the society has gave you?”

During my speech, you put on perfectly white and clean clothes. I name this *the girl of snow.* It is the symbol (*effect*) you have just acquired.

In the blink of an eye, the room snowed. The water left have been frozen, the bookshelf and the cupboard covered with a fresh layer of snow. You really are acting according to your pleasure. For once, can’t you just listen to me?

I am shivering in the cold, snivel running down from my nose.

I put all my strength to pull my shoes away off from the frozen floor to walk to you, who have, for no reason, placed your hand on the bed.

Hey, have you really been turning a deaf ear to what I said?

“A bed has significant meaning, but this is my bed, so you cannot sleep on it. I hope you won’t be doing anything as lacking in common sense as snatching someone else’s bed—this too in reality, this too in *the conscious*. “

In the blizzard that could cause colds, I spit away the snowflakes that have flown into my mouth, and say with all my might.

“But having a dream inside a dream has an even more significant meaning. Well, in this book…oh, for hell’s sake, please stop snowing!”

I want to affirm myself through the book, but the heavy blizzard is in my way.

I can only give up on doing so and put forth an explanation of whatever I can remember.

“Therefore, should you happen to find to bed in your dream, you can try sleeping on it. To dream in a dream may allow you to reach greater depths of dreams. This perhaps is the process of diving from *the personal unconscious* to *the collective unconscious*.”

I speak behind you, while you remain silent.

“*The collective unconscious* is the foundation of all human beings. Humans observe with their eyes and connect to the world with their limbs. Common characteristics owned or shared by humans are observed as *the common unconscious*.”

Myths are the most archaic stories.

And these myths in the world, even countries far away, share a shockingly large amount of similarities. The reason is the birth of symbols from the collective unconscious in humans.

Giants, who appear in myths again and again, are the symbol of evil, feared by children; it came about from the concept of fear towards adult’s subjugation. The Great Flood that destroyed the world comes from the displacement between living safely in the mother’s womb and coming out to walk with one’s own legs in our real brutal world. This huge displacement is symbolized by the destruction and creation of the world. Deities, on the other hand, are symbols of respect to nature or the fear to natural disasters.

In every story, all of the emotions mankind would experience—happiness, sorrow, anger, dismay, love, hate, revenge, life and death—are embedded within.

Every human contains the stories *the collective unconscious* gives birth to.

“This is why we can find such similarities in myths or fairy tales, which led to

the discovery of *the collective unconscious*. Discomfort in the darkness; fear of beasts and enemies; love from parents; love to the opposite gender to give birth to children; all of these biological instincts are also *the collective unconscious*."

I approach you, who are standing beside the bed, with a large step.

The bed, having been soaked completely and then frozen, looked miserable.

Is your denial the result of your hate of approaching the truth and *the collective unconscious*?

"If you are given the chance, you can have a dream again within your dream. *The collective unconscious* is a rule of the heart, a symbol of significant impact on the psyche. An example would be why so many people are saved only by having faith in their gods. The day would come where you must dive into *the collective unconscious* and re-evaluate your foundation."

I see you made no response to anything I said.

"Hey, at least hear what I have to say and face your inner self."

My head lowered in anxiety, I moan painfully.

"I want to help you to be released from this nightmare."

It is the honest opinion of the inner self.

Yet you maintain your silence.

I feel immensely deprived of strength.

"Hey, why aren't you paying me any attention?! I am saying all this for your sake!"

I call you agitatedly, my body trembling not because of the cold, but my impatience. Turning your head around and giving me a look is all I need. I stretch my hands to hold your shoulders.

I hope you can face me.

"What, hey?"

I fail to touch you.

As if there was a transparent film between us, my fingers can’t touch you or feel your warmth. You and I seem to be in a different dimension, with no possible bridge. If this is the case, then why am I in your dream?

You go past me, linger with large steps around the room, as if you can’t see me, or because you have lost interest in me. I am in such a bad mood I am about to turn into a monster.

Monsters are beings formed from past humans.

Suddenly noticing something, you look up.

Your eyes fall on the light switch near the entrance of the room.

Like a bored child, you reach for the switch.

All of a sudden, a fear of my heart being squeezed assails me.

No.

You can’t touch that switch.

“Hey, stop that.”

I beg with my husky voice.

“Please, stop it.”

Click, and the switch is pressed.

You…just wouldn’t pay me attention.

Or you didn’t understand what I said.

The lights in the room are turned off.

The room became pitch black.

As though you closed your eyes, as though you pretended you have seen

nothing, as though you denied everything here, you allowed darkness to fill every corner of this dream.

Chapter 14: Frog

I am falling into a pool of memories.

A pool of memories about your dream.

“Hey.”

I call you in repetition, following you from behind.

“Hey, listen to me.”

I remembered past events like projecting images. In this short instant your dream has been extended infinitely.

Even I have no idea of how far those events are in the past, though it was very far, I could tell. Like a Handan dream, one is prompted to consider it a long journey in one’s life, yet it is but a dream in a blink of an eye.

Therefore, it could have happened a few seconds ago, or thousands of years ago.

Anyway, I met you in this weird nightmare.

No, I didn’t meet you, I discovered you.

I have only vision but no contour, insignificant like a transparent man. I can’t even tell where my fingers are, but I follow behind you like a ghost.

The only moment when I could have a contour is when you stop your long lingering and reach the depths of the snow plain and enter the rainbow-colored tent. When you wake up, or when you pinch your own face, I will be forced to return to that tent.

Only when you wake up can I relax myself in that small, beautifully decorated room. I have no idea of why this is the case. Who are you? And who am I? I can understand nothing of this dream.

My lack of understanding perturbs me. I observe you from behind when you walk in your dream. I believe a key to solving all of this will appear somewhere, a key that will terminate this endless dream, cease this endless lingering, or shed light to the cause of this preposterous dream.

As such, I look for you madly, trying to intervene.

“Hey, wait.”

One day I luckily found you, walking with your two swinging pigtails.

The dream is broad and overly complicated, so I rarely meet you. Experience I have gained so far and your unique walking sound helped me find you.

At first I was cautious and only fixed my gaze on you. Then I couldn’t help but approach you. I try to make sounds, stretch my hand to you, but you take no notice and keep walking forward.

I am unpleased by your negligence.

I chase you like a child wanting to get attention from his or her mother.

“Hey, stop walking already.”

Your pace isn’t fast, but you walk in unexpected directions, so it is still hectic to follow you. You walk as if you know no fatigue, but I follow while panting.

It is difficult to believe that I can get worn out in a dream. And breathing in a dream sounds weird too.

These biological phenomena still restrict me in a dream.

If I am stabbed by a blade, I might as well bleed and die.

You walk in a dense forest. This forest has a fairy tale omen to it, like the forest where Hansel and Gretel discovered a candy house. A lot of trees and shrubs are grown inside. It is anything but a place for strolling. Still you stroll, harboring no fear of getting lost.

But I hate walking in this forest, afraid of tripping over tree roots, afraid of the

bestial cries that come from nowhere, afraid of being engulfed in darkness by the dense branches.

The multitude of trees look like a crowd, forming lines that go off to their destinations, the station, the tram, the shops, and more. Among them, you appear especially lonely. Swiftly you walk, passing through those crowds.

Sometimes ghosts appear in the forest. They look the same as the disgusting sticky candies you find overseas, horrible monsters painted pink or emerald. They wander everywhere in the forest, some grinning, some sighing, some raging.

They would not hurt anyone, doing nothing but lurk in the forest like a beast. But if you approach them, they will stick to you wherever you go like a person of the visköses temperament, not letting go.

Like a gum chewed and spat on the road.

These ghosts are a bother, so you walked even faster.

Perhaps I am also a ghost that keeps on following you. I can’t talk with you. I can do nothing but look at you. I am a more disgusting presence than those trees you ignore.

Memories made with others leave marks on the heart. Contact with others creates cracks that deform the heart. As learning creatures, humans gain important psychological energy during growth even from negative memories. These unpleasant memories are saved as reflective material that reminds humans of what to avoid or what not to do. Some of them are not forgotten, but instead integrated into the unconscious.

The most detestable or painful memories still engrave themselves in the heart. Unable to be seen or touched, the psyche will always amass uncleanable stains.

What stain is there in my heart?

“Hey, who are you? What am I? Where are we?”

I ask you several times, thinking you might know something.

I feel uneasy.

This terror of not knowing what I am myself shakes my sanity. I have nothing to depend on, like a ship in a storm. I made many assumptions, but they are not assured, and no one will come and agree.

The only thing I can ascertain is that I am in a dream, and you are the special one. Other things at most repeat what they have been doing, deformed objects that even I do not dare to approach. You are the only one who travel through different kinds of worlds and gradually alter them.

I believe you are special and living. With this conviction, I hope I can strike a conversation with you.

“Hey, can you hear me?”

I don’t know whether you have a destination. Sometimes you walk straight without doubt, but sometimes you go in circles as if you are daydreaming.

The scene in this forest is the same everywhere, yet you walk around with no drop in enthusiasm. This isn’t a place to enjoy bathing in a forest, and all you do is strolling.

When will this meaningless walk end?

Suddenly you stop.

You have found something, I presume.

In front of you, something is jumping and hopping.

It is a frog, eye-catching in this gloomy forest. Like a gem, its fatness accentuates its awe. More unbelievable, however, is that it does not hate its fat. It jumped around with vigor and life.

In a dream, a frog probably symbolizes luck, hope, and happiness.

It is my misperception, maybe, but I still think things have taken a better turn.

You are probably tired of this endless lingering in the forest. You walk quickly to

the frog. I can only see your back, but I guess your eyes are gleaming. You pay completely no attention to me, yet you are so excited by that frog. I begin to become a bit jealous of the frog.

The frog has a very strong presence, as if it belongs to a higher class than the gloomy forest. You hold out your hands to the vibrantly jumping frog. It does not resist, and you easily catch it. You grip its front hinds, shaking it around to take a better look.

Your head tilted, you seem to be thinking of something.

Since you stopped, I manage to catch up to you, sitting flat on the floor, deprived of strength, busy in regulating my breathing. Then I fixed my gaze on you, waiting for something good to happen.

But however I wait, nothing surprising happened.

Disappointed, you throw the frog away crudely. Are you a child who loses interest in something that fast? I want to reprimand you, but it will be shameful to get angry over a mere frog.

The frog you threw lands on me. Thrown off, I fall to the ground.

After some effort, I got the hateful amphibian off from me and held it in my hands like a doll.

Then I call for you.

“Hey, I think there must be some meaning to this frog. Won’t you try doing a little investigation?”

The frog stays on my hand docilely.

As if domesticated, it doesn’t stick out its tongue, cry, or move.

“Probably this frog is the key to unlocking this dream.”

I did my best to express what I think, yet you just continue walking.

I am getting impatient. I stand up, run a few steps in order to catch up with you.

Cruelty rose in my heart. I did so much, yet you cared not a bit.

I cannot stand this.

You should be worrying and working as much as I do.

I put my face close to the frog’s buttocks.

Then I kiss it and boldly blow into it.

A cruel game village children play.

If the frog, the symbol of happiness, disappears, you will understand what important thing you have discarded.

The frog expands, becoming as round as a balloon. Bigger and bigger it becomes, more unnatural it gets.

In the blink of an eye, the pressure breaks through the frog’s skin and the frog explodes.

But its intestines didn’t fly out. It popped only like a bubblegum.

“How? How’s that?”

Even I myself didn’t understand why I would say that.

Maybe the long walk has drained me out and driven me nuts.

Soon I notice the frog’s skin has flown on your face.

You just stand there, fazed.

“Um. Sorry. Are you fine?”

As if I broke glass in a classroom and hurt a classmate, I am so terrified my face whitened, trembling too.

What am I doing? I did something terrible. I am reflecting on my wrongs, but a bigger question is what this meant.

The frog’s skin moves on its own, morphs, and wraps your face.

When it touches you, its symbol of luck becomes something otherwise.

It looks like a frog mask, as if you entire head is replaced by a frog’s face. Even those watery eyeballs look lively. You touch and poke your face with your fingers, unable to take it off.

Having become a freak with a frog head, you turn to me.

Have you finally noticed me?

I am as happy as a child who has attracted her parents with a mischievous act. Scold me, at least. Tell me I am a bad child and count the horrible things I did.

I tidy my hair, expecting for this moment.

With my hair done, I turn to you in embarrassment.

“I’m sorry. But you just don’t pay me any attention.”

I said apologetically.

But you made croak sounds.

“Hm?”

You open your mouth, sticking out your small and long tongue. It is not only a mask on you. Even the insides have been changed.

You throw your hands on the floor and jumped into the shrubs.

“Wait, where are you going?”

You jumped energetically away, leaving only croaking sounds for me to follow.

“Wait for me!”

Beat, I chase you.

I really have no idea of what is going on now.

But I sense something has slightly changed.

Chapter 15: Neon

I lost you.

But when I find you again, you are jumping around at somewhere mysterious.

Dark covered the place; dark figures stretched everywhere. It is an architecture without any illumination, as if blackness was the colour that dyed it. You, like a frog, meandered through the darkness in that architecture, passing through its lanes.

You run, at night, in this labyrinth-like architecture with a bad cosplay costume.

For your face is covered with the frog's skin, no matter how many doors you pass through or how many places you go to, your face will not change, so the frog is in itself a special change. I haven't named everything yet, but now that I think about it, the frog should be one of those *effects*.

How great it is for it to stick on your face, hard and unremovable.

As I continue persuading myself, I follow you. As you hop around, I feel you have thrown away the rationality in your human nature. You have became agile, and I have lost you a good few times.

This place is enigmatic and easy to get lost after all.

Architectures flood this place, yet darkness cover my eyes; I bump into things all the time, restraining my actions. These restraints seem to limit me, deprive me of strength and motivation.

But I won't give up now. I climb up a building with all my passion, yet the slippery wall gave me no place to hold on to: my hand falls off and strike me on the ground.

What the hell am I doing?

As I climb and fall dramatically, you have already dextrously passed through the crevices of the building and escaped from me.

No, I cannot let you go away. I must catch you.

The building in front of me sprays colours of all the spectrum like the neon lights on a night street. They also look like Christmas decorations, yet this piercing light is painful to my eyes.

I begin to feel worried.

You seem to have gone on a night trip, away from your boring house, but that isn't somewhere you can put trust on. This blazing light emitting from the building is its sign of not accepting your presence.

When you walk forward, noises spring up. These noises resemble car beeps, loud speakers, arcade machines, and computer stops; they also resemble sound of anger or sadness, they deter people, make them fear.

This seems like a *Location* that perturbs people, that puts stress on their shoulders.

I carefully walk along the enigmatic neon lights.

"Woah?"

So careful I was, my head still bumped hard into something, tipping off my balance.

That thing suddenly popped up in front of me.

"W-What is this?"

It is a large stand-up advertisement board, flashing like the neon lights, but it stood firm like a strong man. It has hands, legs, a head, and also a face; its eyes look sternly at me, yet its face is as red as a drunkard.

As it sit like a fitness champion, it still flickers like neon light: imagine such a peculiar being.

“What? Isn’t this only a decoration?”

It looks like an eerie advertisement board, standing there. Although they are invisible, they still though seem to have a nose, and it hurts a lot when I bump into them.

As I stand still, holding onto the board, suddenly something popped up and frightened me.

As I came to my senses, I am surrounded by squirming things.

“W-What’s this?”

A bunch of bright, creature-like things squirm around me. They are as big as me, or maybe smaller, squirming in weird ways and to strange directions.

Their shapes are different, but they emit the same kind of neon light. Some of them wriggle like tentacles; some of them look like arrows or flags; and some of them have only a big and round shining eye, a monster one could say…All of them are vivid, as if the microscopic creatures like fleas and parameciums are magnified to a joking scale.

Through their transparent bodies I see their capillaries and intestines that are so ugly I have to quickly avert my eyes.

Although we bear no understanding to these microscopic creatures and bacteria, their presence in our bodies and our surroundings is true. They have somehow stuck themselves on our lives. These creatures are thus defined *in such way*.

We don’t notice them, but they do exist.

When a normal and honest man steps into the urban noise, he enters a completely new world: all that comes to his eyes are flashy and delinquent females.

They have lived on the same ground and in the same age, yet they share no word or touch.

When you walk in the night, you look extremely excluded from these things. You won’t come into contact with them, nor would you give them an eye. But

you feel sticking around with these dangerous flashy things a better option than solitude.

And so you jump into them.

I want to chase you, but these weird things stop me, restricting any movement I could manage.

I can hardly breathe among them. They take pleasure in noise and lavish it. This strikes me as a carnival or parade for monsters.

How good and refreshing it would be to be a member of them. But to me, excluded, I would feel nothing but depression and unrest. If I join the clamour of this parade, I am sure I would be led astray—If I become one of these night ghosts, I could never recover my human nature again.

It would be like walking along a wrong path in life led by fair-weather friends.

But you, so ignorant, walked to those flashing beings.

“W-Wait!”

I run after you with all my might, like a mother who fears her daughter will turn into a delinquent.

You cannot go there. No matter how boisterous it may look, it will someday perish.

“Guh?”

As I run frantically, my nose hit into a fat monster.

I almost fall down by the pain.

Can these monsters not notice me? Do they not know me or have no interest in me? They move according to their will, ignoring my presence.

If I get myself worked up over them, I would only be the troubled one who let them get into my nerves and trip me over.

I ignore them, push them away, and crawl under the muscular advertisement

stand’s shoulder to reach you.

As I finally get away from that noise, I sighed with a phew.

It is as quiet as a dream. What a relief. Those piercing noises are poison to my body.

I let my hand resting on my chest to fall down, and I look up.

I witness it with my own eyes.

“Hey? What are you doing?”

You sit still in front of me.

You are still wearing a girl costume, entirely incongruent to your frog face. You make it like you have put on the wrong makeup set. You open your mouth, stuffing something inside like a predator.

It looks like a shimmering bird.

Bird usually means stress, but you choke it down, like stuffing coins into a frog’s mouth, or something bad like smoking or drinking alcohol.

“You can’t eat that!”

I shriek, running to you.

That isn’t something nutritious—well, hazardous I assure you. But you stuff it down as if you would die if you don’t eat anything.

You look like a kid who have been stripped from food.

What do you desire?

The neon bird flaps its wings in struggle, but it is gone as it runs down your throat.

I call you nervously at your side.

“Are you all right? Spit it out! Now!”

I scold you like I would scold a kid. I snatch your face and shake you about, to make you spit out the shimmering bird you swallowed. The magical thing is that I can touch you now—probably only when the frog is covering your face.

As you stay still, the frog's skill peels off, revealing your face.

Your face is wet—I don't know if it is sweat or some weird liquid—your eyes closed like you are sleeping, same as usual. This reassures me. If the face under the frog skin becomes someone I don't know, I won't know how to react.

Suddenly you hold your stomach and moan.

"Hey? Are you okay? Must be what you have eaten!"

I look at you worryingly.

Then you flashed—out of the blue.

Neon rays spilled from your whole body, just like the squirming creatures in this world. You have eaten the forbidden; you want to enter this place resembling the urban nights.

From skin to hair, you end up emitting rays across the spectrum.

You look as if you have put on makeup and put on flashy clothes, transformed from a chaste girl to a creature I have never seen.

And it is repugnant.

"Spit it out! You don't need it!"

I scream out my lungs, dissuading you.

I hope you can retain your chastity and remain what you are. But the process of life is a process of contamination. With the cumulation of knowledge and experience, the flow of years will cover your chastity slowly with dust.

You can never return to the purity and innocence as a child.

Horrifying.

Even if you have changed your appearance and become flashy, you are still you. But I hate and loathe, or even fear, your transformed state.

Flashing, you pass through me.

Like a fairy.

Or like a changeling, a child stolen by fairies, a being alien to me.

Your psyche stolen away, you leave me.

Wait for me.

Don’t leave me here.

I don’t want to be alone.

Chapter 16: Sleepwalking

You are in a dream.

You don’t seem to become tired of it no matter how long you stay here.

You wander around without any destination.

Electric signals seem to be travelling in your brain; you seem to have a heightened consciousness of yourself; you seem to be having a dialogue with yourself.

Your stagger around this enigmatic dream world endlessly.

An enigmatic world grown relentlessly with eyeballs and blood-smeared wrists. A large graffiti thrown in with colours of all sorts, which no one can recognise if they look from afar. A dark void with a school of dangerous primates holding spears and shields who just stand there. Mutated fish swimming in a fishing pool, screaming when you touch them, living along with other abominable wriggling beings. A flight of stairs stretching far into heaven. A flickering, broken television set placed in a barren land grown with ancient plants. And at the end are several girls with eyes as sharp as birds who are having a picnic with their open lunch boxes.

You slowly begin to get used to these effects, but you walk as usual. These endless suppressed stages approach us with staggering speed.

You slowly become bold, approaching fearlessly to things as enigmatic as they could be, entering new doors, heading into deeper caves, until you confront your inner ugliness you don’t want to confront.

But you eventually got tired and worked mechanically. You lost interest in everything, lived like a zombie, and fell into repeating dreams—you have almost reached pseudo-death.

As you hate this fake death, you begin to collect impression-striking things in

your dream. These things I name effects have great significance and are procured into your heart. You fill up your ego slowly with these things like puzzles.

Some of them have effects on your surroundings, and as you use them, you advance into even more out of the blue territories.

Every effect seem to be attached with a heavy and painful feeling. As you seem to fill yourself and grow as you collect them, you also become tired—like the process of maturing.

You too use these effects on yourself.

Take the bicycle as an example. In this world of wonder, a small transportation tool is placed. Riding it allows faster transportation and brings you to farther places. To me it is a pain to chase you who are riding the bicycle, your swaying ponytails travelling to the future in surprising speed.

Take the kitchen knife as another example. It's basically your only weapon. You stab mutated creatures with it to kill them. You stab vessels with long legs, things squirting blood, women who are boiling themselves with the onsen, toy soldiers, and more. You even seem to stab me too, so I don't get too close.

But these things have little effects on the surroundings.

Most of these effects are unavailing. They won't make significant changes to the dreamworld, nor will there be hyperbole effects. They only seem to be a little helping hand, such as glasses or rubs that make life more convenient but that wouldn't be lethal without them.

But there is nothing to do anyway. Effects should bear some significance, something they represent, so it is nothing bad.

I helped you in the dark with this in mind.

For example, there is something that spins around in high speed—I should describe as it a coin with a cat's shape. Its too deft for you to catch it, so I secretly gave you a bicycle and blocked the coin's path.

There is a tall strange man beside the fishing pond, so I tied his fishing wire to the effect sunk deep under the pond in advance.

There was an effect lost in the corner of a messy information room, so I threw the effect into a conspicuous monster’s mouth so you would find it easer, but the monster ended up wanting to eat me too so I ran away in a panic.

So with our concerted (?) efforts, you searched the corners of the dreamworld and acquired effects of all kinds. There is now nothing for you to do now. Having completed this task of searching, you have no feeling of accomplishment, nor is there anything to entertain you.

Thereafter you wandered around as your mind really seemed to have died. I also gradually started doing meaningless things again and again, and followed you less, allocating more time to investigation and reasoning.

The only thing that retains its old appearance is the small room in the snowscape. I open the diary there and mark down each effect you acquired. Frog, neon lights, ghost, small man, blanket, soft…

I roll up my sleeves to analyse these unknown symbols, to identify their values, connotations, and metaphors.

They must bear a certain significance to you.

I believe this is the key to break the stalled status, to retain something important.

I thought about a lot of things. What does this dream mean? The only thing we can be sure about is that this dream is real. For only when you sleep on a bed do you go into these dream worlds. Anytime other than that, I cannot escape the small room.

So who are you?

Why am I in your dream?

And who am I?

Why am I so keen of you?

These analyses and investigations have trudged into the territories of philosophy —I cannot find an answer despite my contemplations.

I really hope someone smart can come and explain everything in detail to me.

But because this person doesn’t exist, the only thing I can do is to follow and observe you, finding the reason to everything through reasoning like digging in archeology: finding things in the underground layer of *you*, and doing inspection as I rub their dust off.

No one will tell me the correct answer. At least no one will give me evidence to tell right from wrong. I can only collect information, compare, and reason from the little evidence I have.

When you are awake—or when I’m in the small room—I cannot touch or talk with you. But I can look at you at a distance from the television set in the room.

You are so far away you seem to be at the other side of the television, unable to be touched.

The time you’re awake is extremely short. You sleep as much as an infant. The time when you are awake is so short it resembles nights that you can’t sleep, dozing off to space on your bed. The small room has always been so plain that nothing important resides there.

When you are awake, you often write your diary on the table. The astonishing thing is that the things your write, the words, are very like—no, exactly the same as—the ones I wrote: flute, bicycle, golden hair, hair band…

I am at your side in your dream, so the things we see are exactly the same. It should be no surprise the things that left an impression on us would similar.

The borders between you and me are slowly becoming blurred.

My obstinate investigation to your issues has bridged the distance between us. Our blurred borders are gradually melting.

I, you, I, you.

Your dream seems to be devouring me like the sea devouring a water droplet.

I feel relieved as I chase you. I stretch my arm so I can fall deeper.

I hope to stay at your side.

The effects you collect should be the important things in your inner self. These effects fill you up.

Billy Milligan integrated his twenty-four split personalities into one to become a complete personality. You integrate your perfect psyche by combining your conscious and unconscious to become a sublime saint, an intelligent animus or a meaningful animus—perhaps you can become a deity.

If this is your goal, I can help you. You hope you can become stronger so you won’t fall apart like the Humpty Dumpty. I hope you can acquire a strong psyche so it wouldn’t be lost or hurt.

Even though I am not one of those effects, perhaps something unworthy of acquisition, a meaningless existence that leaves no impression, or even if I would lose my residence when your psyche is complete, I am willing to do so.

Chapter 17: The Sewers

I kept on chasing you.

Even I myself am not sure of the reasons I do this. It's just I cannot help running after you once I saw you. To me, you are special. Be it natural impulses or desire, how can I explain it? It's like the same craving for food and water, like wanting to go to sleep when night falls, and in this sense, following after you becomes my top priority.

In a world with no certainties, you are the only one I can rely on.

You are everything to me.

You kept on dreaming.

You passed through the darkness where the doors lined up at the beginning of each dream. You turned a new handle, and pushed open the door. What that solitary door contained was a scenery more ambiguous than anything you ever encountered.

In a wide, vacant space stood multiple walls. Gigantic walls that are larger than many times your own height. Rectangular in size, it will take much time just to circle around one. Besides these, there is nothing else… creating a mysterious atmosphere.

Like a singular planet floating in cold, desolate space, the walls exist in solitude at this place. You walk on without a hurry between the gaps of the high walls. I lost your track for a few moments when my sight was blocked. However, I am not in the least anxious.

After all, this dream will continue to go on. Even if I lose sight of you, we will cross paths again at another time. This feeling is reassuring…No, it makes me slack. Considering that you won't disappear. Considering that there is nothing to hurt you.

An arrogance is born. It’s alright to fail, I’ll always start anew from the beginning somehow. I will always think in this manner. There is nothing that can’t be undone; it’s all happening in a dream after all. There’s always a second chance… tomorrow, the day after that, and the day after that. Even if I lose your track momentarily, we will certainly meet again. I have never doubted this thought.

I stroked the monstrous walls with one finger. An animalistic pulse beat at my fingertip. Pumping blood to the brain with the rhythm of heartbeats. Connected to the beat, my thoughts pulsed alongside it, thick and thin, with abrupt stops in between. Thoughts do not flow continuously…Does this wall symbolize that? I start to ponder such seemingly deep questions.

I started my search for meaning in every single item, and deduct them. However, what’s the value in that? A surge of pointlessness engulfs me. No matter how much harder I thought the matter over, nothing good would ever come of it.

My thoughts started derailing the moment I felt the hints of boredom. Several paintings with obscure patterns hang upon the wall resembling stamps. Stamps are made mostly for the celebration of certain object or events. Could these be your memories, then? Are these the portraits of your personal recorded memories?

Ah, somehow I feel as if I’ve seen these walls before somewhere. Now, I remember. It’s the movies. Kubrick’s 2001: a space odyssey. The black wall that gave wisdom to primitive humans that were no different from apes–The walls here are no different from the Monolith, the fantastic rectangle.

The creation brought forth by the will of the universe. The object that made man evolve from apes. The beautiful rectangle that symbolized wisdom itself. Also, speaking of movies, there was a wonderful homage in Charlies and the Chocolate Factory, where the Monolith is changed into a bar of chocolate and was then eaten. Preposterous as it is to gobble up the will of the universe like a bar of chocolate, its meaning remains deep….

“Hmm, strange.”

When I came out of my thoughts, you were gone.

I have lost track of you completely.

When I was in the state of a so called contemplation, stuck in whimsical thinking, you've already wondered off. What I fool I was! I scolded myself, and searched around in distress. I ran over to the outer edge of the wall and peered out to the other sight. But no luck. I cannot find you anywhere.

I felt a crushing horror spread in my heart.

Horror, as if every single blood cell inside me grew goosebumps.

It's unbearable to lose you. Panic rose, as if the entirety of food and water disappeared off the face of the Earth.

"Where are you?"

Running round, I shout aloud.

Then—I saw it.

On the ground where I am standing, there is a tiny human-shaped hole, an ordinary-looking hole that clashed discordantly with the eerie scenery around it. It's the boundary line between the clean, flat ground and the grimy sewers. The manhole is open, and I can see below it. Is it possible that you… fell inside?

Traps and holes, with unsettling uses just like this one, are signs for disaster a in every sense. Easy to slacken, slip and fall. Fall into unhappiness and immediate danger.

But I grew conceited and lost track of you, resulting with you tumbling down this hole.

"Ugh! Aghh!"

I kneeled over the manhole and let out a soundless wail. I peered into the depths, but it's too dark to make out a thing. You are not, not, not, there. You fell. I felt sick, suddenly struck with the urge to vomit, as if my internal organs suffered a direct blow.

Facing the hole, I plunged down without hesitation.

It was an impossibly long and vertical tunnel. Falling at full speed, my body and

head hit the walls of the tunnel multiple times, hurting beyond what I could bear. The fall concluded with me crashing fiercely to the ground below.

It was a violent hit. My body bent upwards from the force of the crash as I heard the splintering sound of broken bones.

My body twisted from the crash. I groaned uncontrollably.

“Guh…Uh..Gah…”

My whole body was crashed badly on the ground, falling from a height like that. But since I’m in a dream, it doesn’t hurt at all, it’s all good and safe. I’m probably lying when I am saying that, but I’m not all that incorrect. There exist certain situations when the dreamer feels sensations of heat, cold, and pain. Dreams, with scenes of sanding on a plain of ice, or being licked by burning flames, or dying from cutting into pieces by a thousand knives, can trick the brain of the dreamer into feeling different sensations. The brain considers such sensations suitable with the companionship of pain, and so, a simulation of pain is then underway. Just fake pain sprung from confusion.

Yet, it’s all an illusion of the brain. As long as one is immersed in dreams, all that goes on in the world of dreams resembles the sensation of watching a movie. Dreams don’t happen in the real world, it’s natural the body doesn’t suffer from physical injuries. So it doesn’t hurt at all. Nope. Not hurting. Not hurting at all.. I tell myself this, repetitively, all to keep down the illusion of a non-existent brain-induced hallucination.

“Gah…ah…”

Although the pain lessens, it’s still not comfortable.

I lift up my head and stood up, wobbling. I looked around. It’s dim, with only a near-broken fluorescent lamp, the rays of artificial light flicked in the distance.

Looks like I’ve hit the sewers. Makes sense, given I crashed down from a manhole. The new, mystic atmosphere feels imposturous. Down in the side gutters, a muddy brown liquid of unknown substance gurgled and flowed along the deep ditch.

The liquid is like the simplified relationship of body and mind. No matter what

pure and rational thoughts the mind, or the brain, holds, the body still excretes. The body sweats, collects filth, expels feces, and turns foul. That disgusting slime, that curse of the body, swirled, and flowed onward.

Humans cannot turn into gods or concepts; they are unable to break free from disgusting things. Doomed to become filthy, to crumble, age, and eventually die. We are all menaced by that undeniable fact.

“Ugh…”

I pant, and walk on like a living corpse.

The sound of footsteps echo through the darkness, beyond the sewers that seems to never end, from the other side of this long tunnel.

Could it be the sound of your footsteps?

I want to pull your travelling feet back into my own hands. I want to reach your side… I crawl forward, inch by painful inch.

…Through this stinking sewer, this garbage dump.

Chapter 18: Word Picture

The sewers went on without an end.

At times, a white creature would pop out its head out from the slimy waters and stares straight up at me. The creature resembled a snake, or solidified smoke, and the sight of it send shivers down my spine. Moving slowly like a living creature, it sends sounds of splashes echoing through the tunnels.

A creature as slimy and repulsive like that should not exist, not even in dreams. Just thinking of its flesh, and what that flesh might feel like if one made contact with its skin, makes me wish it would only disappear out of this world.

Trying hard not to look at the white creature, I walked ahead, following the direction of the flow of sewage water.

Even if I don't want to see it, objects associated with the body and flesh still are impossible to ignore. Hair and fingernails grow, the intestines squirm, feces excretes. How foul.

At last, my field of vision grew wide. It seems I've exited the sewers and am now standing outside.

However, gigantic buildings stood alongside the long, tenuous roads. The oppressive feeling still wouldn't leave me be.

Weight accumulates regardless of human will. Unpleasant chunks of flesh grew and blocked my vision, even though I never wanted it to be there in the first place.

The buildings resemble hospitals, or schools. They are colored in plaster white but now filthy, cold and oppressive with boredom. Facilities of society are as impossible to ignore as bodily changes. Rules, common sense, traditions, social relationships… That symbolic building suffocates me, as if my lungs are filled with lead. I diverted my sight.

Eight million years of human history. During this period, the high towers humans built in the name of “common sense” now rots and cracks. Riddled with strange graffiti depicting clumps of flesh and blood, that tower is doomed to crash.

Under such conditions, are we still forced to live up our lives in that tower with our heads pressed down, unable to breathe?

I quickened my pace, as if I am running away from everything that existed.

I run on without a pause.

At last, I reached the end.

Somehow, I ended up back indoors. It seems I am now inside a cave. The walls are covered with small bumps and holes that looked like the dried up eye sockets of zombies.

Although the place looks like a naturally formed cave, there are cleaning facilities placed around out of the blue. Trashcans with wet towels covering the lids looked like cases that persevered dead bodies are carelessly littered on the floor.

Even more eye-catching are the wash basins. The rusted taps caught my attention. Not knowing why, dozens of wash basins are set around. Wash basins are stuck deep in memory, since they are the first things to see when you wash your face every morning. A place stained with stray hairs and human grime, existing only to wash the dirt off of bodies periodically…

The unpleasantness, anger, and hatred born form the bottom of the heart ae dumped here, unprocessed. The negative emotions linger in the air, stench-like. I look away. It’s always a punishment to clean up the toilets, this applies to everyone; no one wants to neither see nor clean the basins, we all wish we could push the chore off for someone else to finish.

Over there. It’s filled with grimy sewage water.

The waste water could spill out at any moment. The pool is full, yet something moves under the surface. The pool of slop will give birth to something cursed by the devil himself.

And there you stand.

This is the end of the road, and there you stood, unmoving, as if helpless.

I finally caught up. My breathing eased, and I rushed over to your side.

I stopped mid-run.

Something squirmed beside you. That thing, it looked like the spirit of a human being. Floating in the air lazily, the pure –white object does not resemble anything of this world. It gilded in circles around you, swimming in the putrid air, dragging its sickly white tail behind.

Unspeakable disgust flooded over me.

I wish you had nothing to do with that thing. I wish it would not loop and bind around you.

I screamed after the white object that seemed to be playing beside you.

“Go away! Don’t come any closer!”

Despite getting tripped over by a plastic can, I still ran to you with all my might.

“Don’t you dare go another inch!”

I yelled hoarsely, and you turned your head, as if you have heard my voice.

I sucked in breath.

You are now a faceless monster. No eyes, no nose, no mouth, as if you left your facial organs behind. I buried my head deep in my arms. What were you like, before this? Do I really know what you originally looked like?

What do you look like—Who, exactly, are you?

I fell to the ground in horror. Uncontrollable shivers took over me.

Right then, you ignored me and walked right by. Clumsily, I reached out a shaky hand…When the monstrous white creature brushed right by my face. I was attacked by a coughing fit of nausea. After I finished vomiting, I lifted my head

and saw you walking into the tunnel. Your body squeezed into the cave nearby.

“Wait! Wait up!”

I barely managed to gather my strength. My body weighed down, heavy as if intoxicated on carbon monoxide or poison gas. Even the movement of a single forefinger brings inexorable pain I felt like I was falling apart into a gazillion shards.

I slipped into the hole you went through. I rolled around once and tumbled to the ground. With my hands pressed tight to my mouth and nose, I lifted my head slowly.

It hurts so much that tears stung in my eyes.

You walked head on without a stop. And I am unable to even grasp your fading image.

I hate that. I hate that you are leaving me further and further behind. I want to remain by your side. I want you, like in a game of Hana Ichi Monme.

But, why are you always leaving me?

Even if I wanted a reply for this question, there is nothing that can give me an answer aside from swirling sewage.

The sewers have passages opening to every side, like blood vessels containing rotting liquid. The continuing sewers gave me the impression o that the pus of life is accumulated here. Not knowing why, the walls that stretch and cover the sewer with its fantastic curves are suddenly hung with numerous frameless paintings.

Rather like an art gallery.

The curvy lines in the pictures seemed to be drawn by an unsteady hand, like doodles made from an imagination-festered child. Human drawings with greatly exaggerated heads and hands; monstrous illustrations that contained not a shred of kindness.

There is a healing technique in psychology through creating worlds, drawings, or

writings. Through these, the mental state of the patient can be quickly identified and examined. But drawings like these absolutely confound me. I cannot figure out what they are trying to express. The paintings make me rather uncomfortable.

If a wailing baby is struck in a crying fit, with enough strength to lift a pencil, this is what the baby will draw. These paintings, containing nothing but chaotic anxiety, are exhibited on the walls.

Too much metaphors and complicated thinking keeps people away from piecing out the true intentions and meanings of the work. Strange movies that are dismissed as works of mere fantasy are treated in this way.

Movies. Thinking of it, where did I watch 2001: Space Odyssey and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory?

I, I…

While I was sunk deep in thought, the sewers came to an abrupt end.

All is pitch black.

No, right ahead—Lay a face of awesome size. A giant, red face with its mouth moving non-stop as if chewing on gum. The mouth laughs obscenely… I feel as if I’ve seen this face someplace else before. Filled with symbolism, exaggerated as it may be, I’ve certainly seen this face before.

While recovering from the shock and confusion, I found you. Right over there. Walking over to the giant face, step after step, gently lifting your hand to touch it —

When the giant, red face swallowed you down with one gulp.

You, eaten alive by that giant mouth.

I shook from head to toe.

“No—“

I rushed forward, panicking. I punched and slapped he giant face with all my

might.

Uncontrollably, words rush out of my mouth.

“Open up, open up your mouth! If you don’t open then there will be no air! No oxygen, she’ll suffocate, SHE’LL DIE—”

Open up. Open up. Open up.

I couldn’t stop screaming. I threw my body at the foul face at full force. I tore at it with my fingernails. I tried with all my strength to wrench open that monstrous mouth. I grabbed at its teeth, hard, but to no avail: the teeth are clenched firmly shut. I grimaced at the stench the spit and brittle made, now covering my face.

At last, I managed to slip under the tongue, which twitched feverishly as if in protest.

I stepped on the internal flesh, searching for you.

“Where are you?”

Although I called loudly, you did not respond. The tongue sprung at me and rolled me down the throat without effort. I couldn’t fight the situation, though I struggled with all my might. I was dropped into the esophagus.

The ground emerged below me, causing me to hit it with my whole body. Luckily the ground is soft this time, so I did not suffer any more injuries. But the softness is nauseating, like I’m standing on squishy viscera.

Am I now inside the body of the monster? Could I be, perhaps, in its stomach?

I looked in all directions for you.

“Where…?”

The darkness was so thick I can’t even make out my fingers. However, there are luminous patters all around. Patterns created in shabby colors—resembling an X-ray film. The meaning of it is unclear; no one can make it out except specialists.

“Where are you…?”

Close to wailing, I inched slowly forward.

In the unchanging darkness, I found a solitary exit, like the baggage checking gate at airports.

I must pass through that gate, and only after making sure I am safe to go, can I be left free to pass through into another world.

Since I find nothing meaningful here, I head to the exit.

I held the solid doorframe with one hand and peaked inside nervously.

A person stood there.

How long has it been since I last seen a normal human being! However, there is something off.

I took a sharp intake of breath. What appeared there was a woolen hat and scarf floating in mid-air. That’s all there is, as if someone invisible stood there.

The hat suspends in the air, making out the round shape of a head. A scarf is wrapped around where a neck should be. These items of clothing seem to indicate that there is indeed a person standing there, but such a person cannot be seen. Or perceived.

That transparent human (?) wandered around in slow strides.

Invisible. I’m also invisible… But it seems that you can’t see me. In other words, this transparent being is the same as me.

So maybe, I’ve found a friend.

And maybe, I’m no longer alone…

Chapter 19: Death By Falling

“That’s not right.”

A voice spoke aloud.

It sounded strange, like my own voice played out of a tape recorder. Although that’s what the voice sounded like, it’s still different.

I touched my mouth, for I feared I spoke aloud unconsciously. However, I don’t think I have spoken.

If so, whose voice was it?

I stared at the figure before me that could only be described as a “Transparent Human”.

It’s contradictory to “stare” at an invisible being; but the hat and scarf did make out the outline of a human, and since I can also hear the sound of footsteps and breathing, I am certain there is someone there.

“Although we are both transparent, we are not the same, you and I. Although we were once the same, but now, we are different beings—you don’t recognize me, so you can’t see me. You can make up the things you don’t recognize by using imagination, but the visualized work holds only incomplete features, broken, shabby… Can’t be seen, can’t be recognized, can’t be understood…Hmm~”

The invisible being tapped away beats as if singing, and twirled around merrily.

Yes, I only guessed the person was twirling away. Since the scarf whipped and spun around in the air, I can guess that the person is spinning. Although I am also transparent, but I still have a working body, only it’s invisible to the eye. Because of my diaphragm, vocal cords, and lungs, I can speak aloud in my own voice. Although the invisible person said that we are “different”, I still think we are in the same situation.

“Uh huh.”

The transparent person giggled strangely. There was the sound of hands clapping.

It’s all transparent, so I can only hear the sounds.

I feel that there are no evil intentions directed at me, but is it really the case? The face is transparent, I can’t make sure if a smile or a smirk is formed there. I can only guess. But I can’t see, recognize, nor understand that person, standing before me in all transparency.

“Thanks.”

Judging from the sweet voice, the person must be a girl. She bowed shyly.

Perhaps. The woolen hat leaned forward.

“Thanks for your hat and scarf, they’re so warm, really – I’m all warmed up by now. I won’t catch a cold or frostbite anymore now, you’re so sweet and caring…”

The ends of the scarf won’t stop skipping around.

I had the hallucination of a young child jumping up and down. Who is this transparent girl? When kind of metaphor does she stand for? Although she chattered on non-stop, I couldn’t understand her words.

Stuck in a one-sided conversation, I felt uneasy and reached out my hand. But the girl let out a quick “yelp”, and backed off in a hurry.

When I walked closer to her, I realized she wasn’t transparent at all, but a cluster of darkness instead. That’ the only expression I can think of. She was colored in pitch black from head to toe.

She wasn’t of dark skin, she was more like darkness cut out with a pair of scissors and then folded into human form.

Because it was so dim, she melted away into the surrounding darkness and made her form invisible.

A girl made out of condensed darkness—of “nothingness”.

She kept bowing her head and apologizing, almost guiltily.

“But, I apologize. I’m really sorry… At the end, I couldn’t grow up after all. This cap and scarf, they ended up entirely useless. You picked them out just for me, and poured so much love inside them. That’s why you can’t recognize me. That’s why, you don’t know my face.”

She repeated the same words over and over.

Like a hallucination. Like an echo.

As if she’s saying it all for my sake.

“But you can’t move on. You kept the cap and scarf by your side at all times. Taking great care to preserve them, treasure them, you don’t have the heart to throw them away in the trash. But it’s all meaningless. Can’t you see? No matter how adorable the hat ad scarf can be, if there is ono one to wear them, they are all plain waste.”

“What is it you are saying all along? What exactly are you?”

I felt uneasy, and asked out loud.

This is almost the first time I found someone else to speak to. I spoke aloud, trying to communicate with her.

I can’t stand talking to myself any longer.

I finally felt bored of all the time I walked on and on without a goal, hesitative, scared, and alone.

To the point I’m bruised and scarred, tired to the bone.

“Hey, if you know something, then tell me!”

Although I spoke strongly, the girl replied like a damaged recording device.

“Don’t know, don’t know, don’t know though…”

Repeating the same words over and over. She isn’t planning on properly conversing at all.

It’s like speaking to yourself while praying at church. Like whispering alone with only your soft echoes reverberating across the air.

I can gain no response from her. Suddenly anxious, I approached her.

She floated away wobbly, out of touch.

“’If you know something then answer me!’ … Is that what you ask? But I don’t know a thing at all, it was all over before anything even began for me—The one who do knows it all, is you, right? You know everything, but why do you pretend you are absolutely clueless?”

Me? Knowing?

What in earth do I know?

While I’m sunk in a chaotic state of mind, the girl suddenly held my hand in hers, like a child trying to catch the attention of parents who are worrying over work and family matters.

The blurry touch of fingertips. The pitch-dark face of the girl seemed inches away from mine; I could feel her warm breathing on my face.

However, no matter how much closer I got, I still cannot see her face.

It’s all because, I don’t recognize her. It’s all because, I don’t recognize the face of this child?

“Um I want to give my thanks—Thank you. Because, you gave me such an adorable hat and scarf. I’m really happy. At that time, I must have been filled with happiness. So, thanks.”

The girl spoke, garbledly.

“Not just the hat and scarf, you wanted too gave me so much more, right? Delicious pastries, warm beds, hugs and kisses… You wished to hold my hand and take me to see all kinds of places, right?”

“That’s why—”The girl whispered softly in my ear while holding my hand in hers.

Instantly, the scenery changes.

I responded in shock, my head spun dizzily.

I am atop a very high place, like stacked blocks of children’s toys. I stood like a toy myself on the very top of it all. Pieces of cubes stacked together lay out in front of my sight. They are like toy building blocks, only impossibly huge.

If I slipped accidentally, I would turn into fallen mush. The wind blew from all sides, almost causing me to lose my balance.

But the girl held me.

A gentle touch. At least, this child seems to treat me very gentlely—She’s been saying gentle things like “thank you” to me from the very beginning.

Still doubtful of the situation that I can’t understand, I stood open-mouthed at the scenery before me.

It looked familiar; the colored cubes are like toys in a toy box. It’s one of the starting worlds the doors led to. But, the cubes are too large for me to climb to the top.

But that pitch black girl brought me up here in the blink of an eye.

Looks like she can move freely between worlds as well.

Yet reflecting on it—did she really “move”? It’s possible that this child exists simultaneously at all places. Connected with this dream, with all the places within this heart… This child exists in all memories and knowledge.

Existing everywhere.

That’s how important she is in this dream.

I can’t help feeling that way.

“You wanted to be with me forever, and go to all sorts of different places, right?

You wanted to travel with me, hand in hand, strolling in the park. But, you can't do that—Because you can't bear to part with it, so you have unfinished desires. You regret, cannot accept. Because none of your dreams come true, the unsatisfied dreams rot inside, turned into grotesque shapes, and are exhibited here."

It seems that she wanted to tell me something.

But she spoke so little, her words too vague… It only confuses me.

"You know nothing. Everything ends in imaginary worlds, in dreams."

Taking my hand, the girl twirled around, dancing.

The surrounding turned lighter, and I can see her outline clearly. It was like what I had thought, a seemingly pitch black person. A girl of ambiguity. Nothing visible aside from a hat and scarf.

That's all I know.

And so, that's all I can see—

"Ignorance brings uneasiness. That's why people read books and comics, browse the Internet, watch movies, and seek advice from the wise. Illusions appear only when people are passionate enough. You forget yourself and enter the story and travel around. Emotions, the heart, dreams…they can enter all sorts of different destinations freely. Yet, if you don't see with your own eyes, feel with your own hands, knowledge remains only knowledge—Just the mere formation of words, patterns of ink, staying only in the realm of imagination~"

The girl brushed her head against me, as I hungry for affection.

Like a young child, showing her parents her latest great discovery.

"in a game, no matter how any dungeons are conquered, effects collected, demon kings slayed, worlds saved—No matter how great an adventure is completed, reality inches not a stop forward. You still know nothing. Still clueless, your mind a black slate. Only imagination continues to bloat away. The scenery changed again.

We’ve entered a gaming world, just like what the girl said.

A two dimensional world resembling computer games of a prior age—Taking a closer look, the girl’s scarf turned into pixels to accommodate this worldview. Besides, there are also rocks and square blots in the same pixelated style. Further up, there are things resembling ancient ruins.

Everything is flat. Flat and boring like the pages of a book. There are beings that looked like primitive humans lurching around at all sides, although they don’t seem to mind us at all.

Because, even if I fought them and beat them down like in a video game, I won’t get any real rewards from the effort. The numerous gold coins and achievements won, the praises earned from a game, have zero connection to real life.

The brain reacts to light, color, and sound; it produces happiness in return. This is the only use of gaming… A short-lived happiness born from a primitive stimulation.

Humans are just the same as animals, reacting only from the given stimulus.

Everything you do doesn’t need you to move a muscle. And you won’t gain any growth from this. Nor can you convert it into experience.

This world, along with everything within its bounds, seem to proclaim this fact.

“It’s meaningless to hold only knowledge and nothing but it. It’s meaningless to have only imagination, too. You can’t go anywhere. Even though you wanted to take me to all kinds of places… you can’t go anywhere. You know nothing. You see nothing. You accumulate nothing. You gain no growth, and remain always void and empty~”

The girl took my hand again, and the world changes again.

This time, I’ve arrived in a manga-like world.

The world is pure white. But, it’s not like a plain of snow. It looked like everything is bleached of color. The buildings and surrounding scenery are very plain, as if drawn bluntly by a pen.

A plain world formed only in black and white colors… You can hear the sounds that resembled the flip of a page from time to time.

Like being drawn into a world of interesting manga.

The short period of blissful emersion in the world of manga, makes one forget the self's existence completely. That's what this feeling is like.

Manga-styled, objects that looked like the exaggerated line art of human body parts lumbered around in this monochrome world.

Abstract, cartoonish beings are in a different dimension from us.

Be it movies, manga, or games, they all exist in a parallel world apart from our reality. Existing far away on the other side of the horizon, never to cross lines with us.

The characters in stories cannot be our real-life friends. They don't exist in the first place. They are nothing but ink. They cannot connect to our hearts, cannot intervene in our lives, and no love exists in between.

I stooped down, nauseated as if from motion sickness. But the girl did not let go of my hand. Instead, she grabbed held of me, hard, and started repeating again.

Repeating the same words on and on, in blame or protest.

Non-stop.

"But, you can't go anywhere. You can only dream it up in your head, only through imagination and knowledge. Dreaming all the time without taking a step forward. You wanted to travel to all sorts of eye-opening places, but you can't go anywhere…Hey, why is it you pretend that you don't know?"

The girl's voice is laden with sorrow and blame.

Suddenly, the soft touch of her gentle hands dissipated.

"As long as you feign ignorance, walking onwards is meaningless. If you do not move forward in real life, you are not heading anywhere. Even if you run onwards with full strength, you merely keep up the status quo. No matter where

you go, no matter how you seek, you will never find what you craved for. The gap will never grow short; you are condemned to watch from a distance for all eternity. Treading in heartbreaking sorrow, you will never catch up with the Red Queen for the entirety of your life—“

I was pushed slightly on the back.

In a flash, I was back at the top of the cube.

I was pushed downwards from a height so extreme I can’t even tell where the ground is.

My body starts to fall. I waved my arm and legs in distress, but there is not a thing I can cling to. As if attracted to the ground like opposite magnetic poles—

Falling downwards in a straight line.

I hate falling.

“It’s pitiful, right? How sad—“

Spoke the girl in the hat and scarf, now further and further away from me as my fall picked up speed.

That pitch-black person spoke in a pained voice.

“So sad, right—“

Calling out in impossible tones, she stared silently at me.

The ground draws close.

The crush coursed through me the next second.

I emit an ear-splitting smash.

Broken into pieces. Blood and bones fly in the air.

The world before my eyes is bloody red.

Chapter 20: Don’t Look at Me

“Are you dreaming?”

I heard a voice.

My sight remains a blood-like crimson. It’s not red because of spilled blood; it is the light that shone on my eyelids and lit up the blood vessels underneath caused the redness. The scarlet face of the speaker squirmed strangely, and sneered like a haughty king…

I hear sounds around me. I can see, even though my eyelids are shut dead.

However, my body felt frozen over. I cannot move an inch of my fingertips.

As if a ghost pinned me on my bed.

Like the muscle tissues in my body are plucked clean away. Or, as if my brain is transplanted onto the body of someone else. As if I am not myself, I cannot move according to my own will.

The so called condition of “Sleep Paralysis” is actually a symptom when only the brain is awake. In other words, it’s a waking condition when only the mind is awake while the rest of the body lays dormant, unable to move.

Only the organs that continue their activities while sleeping, such as the heart and lungs, go on working as usual… Only your heartbeat and breathing exists as before.

My conscious seemed fully awake. I am awake, am I?

However this feeling of lucidness comes as a first for me. Thus, I am confused.

My head is dizzy, my memories jumbled. I can’t think straight, as if I’ve slept too much.

I have a blurry memory of standing on top a cube made out of toy building

blocks, then pushed to the ground by a girl or being that wore a hat and scarf. Then I crashed to the ground and was smashed into pieces.

That's incorrect. In that colorful tent—In that adorably decorated room, you switched the light off. Then I tried switching it back on.

The timeline of events is jumbled. Time is mixed up, confusing me.

The way time flows in dreams is different from real life. The fleeting dream scenes have no internal logic linking them together, like a novel with many missing pages. The alternate routes, the composition of the story, they all co-existed in my head—and terminated at the same moment. Then I woke up.

My body was strangely heavy.

My ears won't stop ringing, buzzing, echoing.

The stimulus was terribly painful to me, as if everything existed inside a torture chamber made for my personal suffering.

If, I have already opened my eyes wide. If, this is reality.

Then what an unpleasant place has this world came to be.

"How unbelievable."

Sounds circulated near my ear.

"What people call sleeping, and, in addition, dreaming… is a form of escapism. All to run away from this hateful reality… But I don't think you need to hate the real world that much at all. Ah, well, maybe dreams aren't that romantic, not made of pink cotton candy or glittery stars—Dreams are just physical mechanisms, to be blunt. They're not in the least mysterious, but there isn't enough science to support that claim, either. Although Jung, who likes the supernatural, tends to believe otherwise."

Jung. Jung. Jung.

Everything's tied up with Jung—I hate it. I've grown sick of that name.

“Even in the age when magic and alchemy were regarded as common sense, there wasn’t a shred of mysteriousness attached to dreaming at all. Dreams were thought of as scientific, explainable physical reactions. As early back as Aristotle’s time, sleep was considered an condition evoked by the steams emitted from lungs.”

I did not know about that, because my eyes were closed.

Someone, not of my knowing, spoke proudly near my bedside.

“As the ages advance, the reasons that caused sleep are gradually unveiled by science. Sleep is induced by substances that functions on the brain. Leucomainecytohormone… Though the meaning of different substances, along with scientific explanations, the mysteriousness is peeled away from sleep and dreams. Sleep, which started out as Hypnos the god, sunk as low as Hypotoxin the chemical.” He spoke of abstruse topics.

In response to that, I felt a little sleepy. Even though I was naturally awake just moments ago.

“And then, the secretions of the brain that induces sleep has been found as well. It’s related to the drop in human body temperature when sleeping. It’s a substance that could be expressed in a chemical formula, it’s very theoretical. Of course, boredom is another important factor of sleep—The same as you are feeling quite sleepy yourself.”

I am shocked by his words.

The person who speaks these words, knows I’m wide awake.

“Your heart rate accelerated. You can’t fall asleep when you respond to outer stimulations. If your mind follows a blurry, relaxed state that processes easy, brain-unrelated work, kept in a standstill state with no stimulations, you will feel drowsy. Humans feel this way because the brain believes it acceptable to rest. The human brain uses up a lot of energy, and so it rests when it can. The brain is lazy in this way.”

I cannot even manage to show agreement to his words.

My body has fallen into slumber once more.

“Energy saving is an animalistic instinct that traces back to primitive times. If you don’t save up energy, you won’t survive in nature. But to humans, who have evolved into highly socialized beings, energy saving is an unneeded function. When you feel like sleeping, your concentration slackens. It’s like when you are driving tired, your attention will get distracted by the roads. You cannot think properly, cannot write an essay well, nor can you use your intellect to your normal level when your brain is in that state. You cannot think flexibly, but act on impulses only.”

Sounds like the speaker is not a big fan on sleep.

Scorn is mixed in his voice.

“Sleep, dreaming, the subconscious…. Are all useless functions . Trash long discarded and forgotten in the long journey of evolution from beast to man. Once dominated by sleep, humans will regress backwards into beasts. To put it in another way, humans will become mere machines that react blindly towards fate and the changing world around them. Carrying out the same actions day after day. Their hearts won’t be moved, they have no free will—They are nothing but clumps of moving matter.”

That voice dripped with hatred.

“They are anti-human, reasonless, enemies of human civilization.”

We must conquer and rise above sleep and dreams—That voice declared like a dictator.

I felt impatient of the voice near my bedside, pouring his views and claims. I tried blinking my eyes open for a change.

At the very least, I wanted to see what that person looked like. Being bombed by words like this is not an enjoyable situation. I wanted to talk to this person, and consult upon the points I did not grasp completely. There are some questions I wanted to ask this seemingly knowledgeable person. Who am I? Why am I always dreaming these endless nightmares? What exactly is that dream?

I took all the strength I had to open my eyes, like a newborn child.

“Eek—“

Sudden terror seized me.

A soundless, guttural wail was released from the depths of my throat.

My sight is blurry, my vision unable to concentrate like oversleeping on a weekday morning. Perhaps it's because of my fuzzy sight, I was able to see that alien object with my eyes. Right in front of me lay a giant face. Someone's face, is staring straight at me.

No, not a face, but a face-like object. Its shape seemed to me melting away from extremely high temperatures, spinning around like a swirl. Everything around it spun in a chaotic blur. The ringing in my ears rose to a high-pitched scream, as if someone is screeching directly into my ear. It made my head very uncomfortable.

In the daze, I understood. What I was seeing seemed to be a man. "Sensei", I heard someone address the shape. Is he a doctor, then? In this chaotic sight that looked like a painting scribbled with shaky strokes, I managed to piece out my surroundings—an old-fashioned TV set, stacks and stacks of books; my body seemed to be supported by a bed.

Is this a hospital room? The arrangements around seemed extremely clean, neat, and plain, all infused with the smell of medicine. The lights are bright, blindingly so. The strong light that showered me from head to toe is almost impossible to bear.

Am I in a hospital? Or maybe, a mental facility…?

I don't know where I am, but I am terrified. In this world where everything blurs away, fear had clenched me in its tight grip. I waved my hands around my face, desperate to chase those horrifying things away. The wail that charged out of my throat mixed with the ringing sound in my ears into a discordant cacophony.

"Calm down, miss, please calm down—"

Human voices surround me. My shoulders are held down by strong hands.

I fought as if my life depended on it.

The face that stood aside, possibly the doctor, looked at me as if I am a monster.

I hate that look. Don’t look at me. Don’t look at me that way—

I want to look away. I want to run away. But if this is reality, I have nowhere to run. I can only live in this world. But, I don’t want that. It’s better in the dream. Yet, if so, is there nowhere to run to aside from dreams? My head is so heavy. I tried raising my body, but failed in the process—I fell back, again.

A hit, on the back of my head.

A break, in the circulating of my bloodstream.

My brain, gave up on consciousness gladly.

Part 3 - Dream Diary

第三部 帯日記

Chapter 21: Picture Story Show

I was shaken awake by someone.

I had the recollection of being shaken awake like this in mornings when I was almost late for school or work. At first, the shakes were soft. But gradually the shaking got rougher, and my shoulders were grabbed and swung around in all directions.

How irritating. I don't want to wake up, because reality is too cruel. To think that I would have to see that…terrible thing, my eyes shut even tighter.

I ignored adamantly. I refuse to wake, and turned on my side.

I want to keep on living this way, immersed in dreams.

When a strong hit crashed on my stomach.

"Gah!?" The air inside my lungs was knocked clean. I coughed for a while.

I had the sensation that someone jumped on me—

—And slapped my face, making sharp "cracks" when the palm made contact with my check. My hair was yanked around, as well. At last, I couldn't take it any longer, and opened my eyes.

"Eek!?"

My eyes widened from shock.

Before me, was a face.

The distance in between was far shorter than arm-length, If I spit out my tongue, then we would probably make contact. That's how close we are. Way, way too close. My entire sight is filled up with that person's face.

"What… What do you want?"

The kissing distance unnerves me, and I squeezed my body up into a ball.

Maybe that person was planning on waking me up with a kiss on the lips, like they do in fairytales. Seeing that I'm awake, that person frowned and smiled regretfully.

And then, a hand touched my face softly.

An amiable gesture.

The hand was icy cold, sending shivers down my spine.

As if I'm being touched by a ghost.

The touch of fingers does not feel human. I don't know what substance the fingers were made of, but they have the dryness and smoothness of paper.

I rubbed my sleepy eyes, and took a good look at this "someone".

She's a person with delicate features, appearing to be a young girl. Perhaps, she is slightly older than you and I … But she gives out an impossible, calming atmosphere, an adult-like feel.

Strangely, all the colors on her have faded off, like black and white movies of the Showa era. Her skin and clothes are all in the color of black and white. However, it seemed natural—it fits her well. She looked like a character coming out from a manga page, yet, she is not flat, but three-dimensional. Her smiles are kind, but she kept staring at me.

"Um—"

I felt as if I know this person.

She looked that the girl who I've just seen (I don't know if I can say this, considering the time sequence in dreams are messy) playing with you. They look really similar; this girl and that colorless girl who played with you in that monochrome world—

But, it couldn't be the same person. Although the resemblances are striking at first glance, but the height and hairstyle is obviously different.

Even if I looked closely, I still cannot obtain any impression of this girl, strangely enough. She gives off a unique tasteless feel. She is pretty, but there aren't any striking features on her face. If you took only the "plainest", normal features of the world's most beautiful girls, and piece those normal-feeling features onto one face—that's what her face looked like.

Like the concept of a "beautiful girl" simplified in manga style.

No matter how closely I looked at her face, I still cannot find any characteristics that normal humans have. Facial pores, the wetness of the eyes, moles or scabs —You won't find such things on her.

Although we stood very close, but I felt as if I'm looking at her from afar.

Her bangs that are cut into a straight line and the ponytail is tied up casually at the back (her hairstyle felt very old-fashioned). Even though I stood close to her in a distance that should enable me to count the hairs on her head, yet her hair seemed to be painted on computer software, for all I can see is complete blackness, making out no details.

Her slanting eyes were dim, and squeezed into thin lines as if in a smile. But it looked as if a crack is planted into her face.

This female figure, eerily surreal as if drawn on paper—

I blinked a few times. She smiled wider, as if relieved, then straightened her figure.

After her face drew away, I can finally see my surroundings.

As I have guessed, it was the monochrome world I saw on the cube.

A world resembling the line art of a manga age, like the printed words on a page without illustrations.

Exactly. It gives one the feeling of reading manga. Lines, that resemble manga frames, are drawn everywhere. Concentrated lines lay all around. The lines form three-dimensional frames and enclose me inside. The grass on the ground are represented in a simplified style, looking like rows of little Ws. WWWW.

Although everything seemed to be caught in flames, the fire is actually quite harmless. It's not hot at all. Strangely enough, heads fly in the sky. However, the art style of the heads isn't lifelike at all, so it's easy to ignore them, like flipping over a page—No matter how sad and pitiful the stories represented in novels and manga may be, even if Armageddon happens in the stories, reality won't be affected a bit.

Cactuses grow around unnaturally. They remind me of my hands that go unnoticed by me when reading a book. The singular finger that parts the pages often goes unnoticed. At times, the pages of the manga would have reddish liquid oozing out as if nosebleed dripped on it.

What is up with this world? What metaphors underlay here?

Generally speaking, colorless dreams are near-forgotten dreams.

People's dreams change from colorful to pale, from pale to monochrome, and at last grow transparent and disappear completely. Like memories buried deep in the past, or a dream that peeled off from a long forgotten memory, a dream of no worth—

What is it have I forgotten?

"Hah?"

Out of the blue, the girl who kept staring at me drew out her hand.

I covered my face quickly with my hands, as I had the hunch she would hit me.

But she only stared at me in confusion, and then pointed her finger at my stomach. That's when I finally realized that there was another person sitting on me.

A weight pressed down on me.

I lifted my head, and struggled to take a look. I gasped in surprise.

The person who sat on me was the girl I sighted from a distance just then (?) – The girl who played with you.

She looked younger than I am, still a little girl.

She was black and white from head to toe, including her clothes. On opposite sides of her heads were two childish ponytails, jumping around like the tails of animals. Or like the wings of angels.

The oversimplified eyes and mouth made her look like a doll.

Same as the other girl, I cannot feel any body temperature from her, either.

Although this makes me feel a little creeped out (she doesn't feel like something of this world!), but she means me no harm. She's very peaceful.

That little girl in black and white rode on my body and tried waking me up in the way the countless little kids in manga or animation do. Just now, was it her that shook me non-stop?

Although I'm already awake (at least, my eyes aren't closed anymore), the girl still shook me back and forth, back and forth, as if addicted to the act. Her shakes seem to demand "wake up, wake up".

Then, the elderly, quiet girl stopped her actions as if blaming her, and then patted her on the head.

The young girl smiled innocently, then hopped off my body and wrapped her arms around the elderly girl's waist.

The two of them fixed their eyes on me.

"Um—"

I started to speak to the two girls who seemed to be sisters. I felt as if I am a newly introduced character in a manga setting. Pictures that move around can only be described as strange.

Nevertheless, the condition before my eyes is way beyond my reasoning.

I could barely move my body. I remember falling, no, being pushed down from a very high place, then smashed to the ground. I feel as if I've already broke into pieces, but I can't see anything because of my transparency.

Smashed into pulp. Damaged beyond repair. In common sense, I should have been dead by now.

Blood flows from my body. My clothes cling to my skin stickily, since the blood hasn’t yet dried off.

I looked skywards. The colorful cube now vanished without a trace, nothing remain aside from the sickly pale sky. The girl in a cap and scarf seem to wonder around in different worlds from time to time. Has she lost interest in me, and now wondered off elsewhere—

Why did she push me, then?

A push, or pat on the back signifies encouragement, it’s a very positive gesture. But then again, people might pat backs to help others who are suffering from anxiety or epilepsy.

Did she push me on the back because I refused to move forward? Is it because she wanted to help me?

After I woke, I fell and hit the ground. The monochrome girls who seemed like sisters found me, and woke me up afterwards.

The monochrome sisters (?), mysterious as they are, seem to hold no interest in me, so I’ll just ignore them. If they really meant me harm, then they would have harmed me when I was knocked out.

But since they woke me up, they can be assumed as friendly people.

At the very least, they can intervene my actions just like the girl in the cap and scarf did. They can touch me. To me, who is always ignored and looked past as if I don’t even exist, I couldn’t be happier.

I can talk to them. I can touch them. Just these points are enough for me to value them.

I must grab the chance while I can.

“Excuse me—”

I spat the blood out of my mouth, and called out towards them.

“Can you tell me who you are…?”

But, the girls only looked at each other, and tilted their heads as if they don’t know how to speak. Although they have the outer appearance of humans, their actions are quite like animals.

As if hit by a sudden idea, the younger girl puffed her chest high with a “hmm” and grabbed both of my hands in hers.

With a strong grip, I was pulled on my feet.

My blood flowed on the ground like little red streams.

I don’t know if they can see my damaged, transparent body, but the girl gripped my hands gleefully and pulled on with great strength. The older girl seems to say “well done, well done” and stroked the top of the young girl’s head.

The two of them snuggled closely, faces touching, like a warm harmonious family.

“Excuse me…”

I stood up wobbly while being pulled onwards by the sisters, who seemed to be leading the way.

“That child—the girl with the twin braids, do you know her? Do you know where she is? Can you please tell me?”

Still, I was worried.

But the monochrome girls did not answer the question. They only kept dragging me forward.

Just come with us and you’ll find out. They seem to say.

Ad so, half-dragged forward, with the feeling of someone shoving a manga into my hands and demanding me to read it, we stumbled onwards as if we are leaving this black and white world behind.

Chapter 22: Blood Letters

I fell.

Despite being pulled along by the monochrome girls, my body is not in a state fit for running. I felt as if I've already cracked into pieces. Bones snapped, flesh tore open, blood running around like rivers….So it seemed.

Naturally, I'm transparent—I cannot witness the pitiful state of my body, therefore I can only estimate the damage through pain. But, if I did see, I would certainly resemble the dirty carcass of a frog run over by a car.

Not knowing why, my blood becomes visible the moment it drips to the ground, making a thin trail of scarlet marks. However, possibly, I am the only person who witnesses this bloody trail.

Although I don't know how many kilograms of blood the human body contains, but I feel I've lost far more blood than the human capacity. My blood is sprayed all over, like water shooting out from a hose. The gory scene reminds me of past horror movies.

"Ugh, ughh…"

I couldn't move another step and splat to the ground.

My head spun, my vision blurs. My body lurches face forward and hit the ground, drowning in the sea of my own blood.

The monochrome sisters (?) who held my hands seemed to stop moving forward and worry over my condition. Yet, my vision was a blur, so I couldn't see clearly.

I was like a ball of ice cream that plopped to the ground. My mind churned madly.

What was the scene I witnessed then— In that hospital-like place, when a

doctor-like person, spoke to me. He spoke of… abstruse ideas, concepts I didn't understand…

That scene, blurrier than a dream, yet strangely realistic, distraught me. It was the first time I've seen anything like that. It set apart from the other dreams—the startling confusion like reading a novel that had its page numbers mixed up, so that the flow of context is all wrong, all out-of-place…

Although that scene only appeared for a short time, it had worn me out. My head is heavy, as if I gobbled a stomachful of sleeping pills. I can't think properly. It's painful, like being boiled in one of hell's cauldrons.

People dream in order to process the experiences they went through in real life. Dreams also help in relieving stress. If what I saw in that hospital room is a part of my reality, then I don't want any of that. What I witnessed was overwhelmingly heavy, beyond organization, and impossible to process. No matter how many dreams I go through, I still couldn't face it.

I have difficulty breathing like I'm dropped on a planet with an unbreathable atmosphere, bringing me to near suffocation.

"Ughhh…"

I was whimpering in pain when I suddenly saw… The blood that poured out from my body flows into bright red patterns on the ground like paint. Into numbers, into the number 4, to be exact, the most sacred, most valued number to appear in dreams.

If the symbols were ○ or □ , then they stand for stability. ○is the shape of a Datura, and□is the calming shape of a national flag.

Balance, peace, order—These three elements united will produce the most perfect dream—the final goal all people hold, the highest ideal. 3 is unstable, 5 is sloppy, but 4 is the most stable number off all. Books, cigarette boxes, buildings… the most often used objects in the everyday life of humans are mostly rectangular in shape. And for this reason, 4 is the most comforting number of all.

Nevertheless, the first number that appeared is 4.

But, because it’s drawn in blood, it does make one feel the inauspicious connection of death.

The numbers. They multiply.

4. 36. 84141089…888888….01010101….

As if someone dipped his fingers into my blood and painted these numbers on the ground.

But I can’t see the person who is doodling on the ground with my blood.

Like a supernatural event. Strangeness beyond comprehension—It unnerves me. I lift my head.

Without my noticing, the scenery round me changed.

But, to think of it, such things aren’t worthy of making a fuss over anymore.

I’ve seen all kinds of view while chasing after you. I’ve wondered through all sorts of bizarre dreams, so that I won’t get surprised over anything now. In reality, it takes a large amount of energy just to take one step forward. But in dreams, in the realm of the mind, be it India, the universe, or a different dimension, I can arrive at any destination at the blink of an eye. No need for passports or checkups or all kinds of complicated paperwork, I can travel around the word in an instant.

While my head flooded with thoughts, I took a good look at my surroundings.

The scene is familiar. I’ve been here several times when I followed you. It’s one off the worlds behind one of the starting doors. Perhaps this dream is a surface dream, residing on the top layers.

The style here is somehow futuristic. The smooth floors are polished bright, sparkling. Not a bit of dust or dirt can be found on its surface. The light passes through the floors wonderfully. Like twin mirrors reflecting, infinity lies in between. I feel I’m placed in the circuits of this giant world, stuffed away in an infinitesimal corner.

I am only a tiny part belonging to the world, to society. Compared to the

universe, to Earth, I am impossibly small. This place seem to keep reminding me of how insignificant I am.

A vertical wall I placed on the floor I lay .

Hundreds of circuits are buried in this wall. It’s like the mainframe of a computer, with many naked wires jumble around. The patterns of the circuits look like a group picture of a group of man with their arms hooked around each other’s’ shoulders and laughing. If you simplify the circuits of human relationships and the existence of society to the extreme, will they look like this, then?

If one does not participate in this giant circuit named society, one will only feel lonely, and get distraught over solitude at the tiny corners of this giant world.

Even if I fall asleep, society will keep on spinning.

In dreams, machines and circuits are measurements of the smooth going of personal life. If everything runs smoothly, the machinery will keep moving without a pause; if not, the gears will be damaged or stop working completely. Then what does this scene mean—blood is actually coming out of the machine.

Does this situation qualify as “damaged”?

Is this not a sign for the damage of the heart?

As I turned these thoughts over in my head, the blood letters on the ground started morphing again.

The symbols were only numbers and codes at first, but then they changed into Hiragana and Katakana, even into Kanji. At last, pictures are formed.

What the blood pictures depict seems to be the monochrome girls I met just a while ago.

Although the drawings are crude and hard to recognize like the doodles of children, still, some characteristics of the girls are grasped. The long-haired older sister. The younger sister with twin ponytails. A drawing of the two of them standing together.

Was it them who drew this picture and the numbers? As the world changes, we all turn transparent, unrecognizable, and drift further and further away. I can only retain my own form in that rainbow colored tent.

The two of them, could they only be seen by others in that manga-styled black and white world?

But, just like using new words one learnt from novels and manga in the real world, this world can still be intervened, little by little…. I came to this conclusion, though not knowing why.

As I watched the drawing, ellipses appeared near the human doodles like speech bubbles.

“Restraining is no good for the body.”

“Nor for mental health!”

Speech bubbles appear near the little girl. The handwriting was a little messy, could it be that the younger girl wrote it? Then, the elderly girl erased the words in the bubble, and then wrote again in clear and tidy handwriting.

“Pressure comes when one is enduring—“

“Restraint, endurance, bound up….These acts burden the psyche, and makes it grow twisted. Depressions appear in the pillow when you use it too much, heavy bookshelves will cause dents in the floor. And so, if humans are burdened by great pressure, humans will get squashed into pulp.”

“Just like the state you’re in!”

“Once the outer skin of ‘consciousness’ breaks, the subconscious will come bursting out. This is why sometimes people break out in anger or uncontrollable crying fits. Pressure makes hearts grow all twisted. The subconscious is often the opposite of consciousness, and so, when the subconscious breaks out, people often get startled.”

“Like whenever a teenage crime occurs, everyone says “But that kid was always so nice and kind’!”

“Pressure twists up the heart till cracks appear, and then it crushes the heart up. This is the one point that Freud and Jung seem to agree on.”

“Naturally people can understand this, because we can all relate to it!”

“Once the pressure builds up, the psyche is naturally suppressed and squeezed up. And if a crack appears, then the psyche and subconscious will come bursting out in an instant.”

“Like when you shake and shake and shake a can of soda. You lift the ring and the bubbles erupt!”

“Because of the carbon dioxide, the volume increases. The volume of the can is not enough to hold it all in, so out it spills when there’s an exit.”

“I love fizzy drinks!

“To avoid that, one must decrease the pressure—carbon dioxide as much as you can. Or you release the pressure from time to time.”

“Or else, it will all go sticky! Stickyyy!”

The drawing of the little girl grew “sticky” as s the words appear. Her form starts melting away. Unsettling. Repulsive. Her body splits in the middle. One of her eyeballs popped outward and rolled away. A disgusting substance drips from the edge of her mouth. Arms and legs grow haphazardly on her body.

The monster depicted in a cute art style is unnaturally horrific.

This chilling drawing is drawn in red blood. The redness of stoplights—the redness that signifies “stop”.

“What…are you…?”

I managed to lift my body, and stared at the blood letters that starts appearing and wiped out repeatedly.

I feel that my clothes are soaked with my own blood. That fact that I am transparent makes this fact more eerie. The circuits around me flicker, the sharp

noises are sickening. It’s impossible to fall asleep while listening to these sounds, the same as one cannot sleep while listening to snores or the noise of teeth gritting together.

Even the most passionate computer engineer would eventually be drawn to or attracted by the so-called machinery of humans, who have the complexity of a labyrinth map. They would then try to imitate this machine made by god. And I thought of this alone with my tiny head in a small corner of that machine.

“Why me? Why are you two coming after me? This dream belongs to that girl, does it not?”

That girl. The one I’m always chasing after, the one with the twin braids…

Where is that girl? Where am… I?

“I’m only a minor character in her dream. Just like you guys, a mere symbol, that’s all. Right? Because, that child is the main character—all the changes, all the effects revolve around her. She is the heroine of this dream. Hey, am I right or not?”

“Is that so?”

“Could be though.”

A “?” appeared in blood.

“We, aren’t gods. So we don’t know everything.”

“The knowledge gained in manga rarely works in real life!”

“Who’s the dreamer of this dream? Who dreamt it up? That’s a very difficult question indeed. In the story of Alice in Wonderland, Alice and the Red King dreamt each other’s’ dreams. In that case, who dreamt it?”

“The Jabberwocky’s coming! Jabberwocky!”

“All humans are linked together in their deepest dreams, through the collective unconscious. Although we look different on the surface, yet deep down, we all dream the same dreams… That’s one way to put it. In this case, who is the

dreamer of the dream? Who is the main character in a multiplayer online role-playing game?”

“Deep questions!”

“You cannot see, nor reach the psyche. It’s impossible to peak in the hearts of others, as well. If so, how are you so certain that you are in someone else’s dream? Where’s your evidence to back up this claim? In an online game, it’s hard to distinguish an NPC from player-controlled characters. The only character you can make absolute certain that is not controlled by a computer program is your own character, but you cannot be sure of the others. Now, you are saying that you are the NPC in the game, a non-entity controlled by a program, while someone else is the hero!”

“How strange, no? How strange for you to say so!”

What …is the meaning of this this?

As if the ground beneath my feet cracked apart. A revolting panic surged in my chest.

This is your dream. I was only chasing behind you, the main character. Why then, was I so certain of this? Why did I believe in this without a single doubt?

The entire world churned before my eyes.

I’m dragged out of the safe comfort of the audience seats and forced on to the center stage, blinded by the blazing spotlights.

Just like that. I cripple from stage fright, an actor who doesn’t even know her assigned role.

I shook my head. It’s far too soon to actually believe in the words of these people.

Important hints and truths are hid in dreams, but it’ s very difficult to discern what is true and what is false. Most of the time, the hints are pure garbage. Just senseless babble out of the mouths of Tweedledum and Tweedledee. In this subconscious world where truth mixes up with lies, I must find out for myself the correct answer I believe to be right.

If I don’t believe in this, if I don’t tell myself to calm down, I cannot make this uneasiness inside me go away.

The blood letters flow onwards.

“Consciousness and subconsciousness are like the twin sides of a piece of paper, and so, everyone’s got double personalities. The person you are on the surface and the person you are within are two different personalities. Therefore, it cannot be helped to consider your own self as another person in such cases. Although there are shared, connected personalities, they are still not the same.

“Like a stranger, stranger~”

An object darted over the words.

An extraordinary object, flat and roundish, seemingly having human feet at its bottom. It ran past in a hurry, stepping over the bloody writing and ran out of sight.

“Humans, they understand themselves to some extent, if they themselves are aware. But you cannot understand your subconscious, because that’s a different personality altogether. That creature that ran past, are you able to explain its existence? To understand it as well as you understand yourself? But to you, that child is the same as that creature—the “other being” that is connected to you like a twin.”

“Now, which one is on the surface, and which lies within?”

“She is another entity, but also your own self. Like the two sides of a coin—That’s why you cannot leave her alone, cannot stand being away from her, cannot help but care for her. So that’s why you’re always chasing after that child, right?”

“What are you saying? I don’t get it—” I groaned, while staring at the bloody words on the ground.

Although a certain understanding is made deep down, I couldn’t face the realization.

But, the monochrome girls won’t allow me to back away.

“You can’t understand this, because you hit it away. You suppressed it. Kept it down. But all of that turned into pressure in the end—and disfigured your psyche. If you keep up like this, you will burst apart. Quite like this.”

Suddenly, a door appeared in front of me.

The door is flung wide open.

I’m tossed through the open door into the other side. My shoulders were seized, lifted, and thrown roughly. My nose smacked the ground forcefully. I howled out of pain.

I jerked up my head, and was dumbstruck.

I’m inside a tiny room, rather like my own room under the rainbow-colored tent where my existence is valid. Yet, inside this room, numerous creatures are packed tightly together.

They are the same type of creatures that ran past the blood letters, flat and roundish, packed tightly together like insects, moving slowly, like in a full subway compartment.

As if they don’t even have the room to shift their bodies, the creatures moved shoulder to shoulder, compressed tightly, as if they are afraid of the cold. I’m terrified that they might trample me over.

I hate it. It’s scary. I can’t, breathe…

“The reason you cannot breathe is because you’ve held your breath too long.”

“And if you don’t breathe, you’ll die!”

A puddle of my blood accumulated near the door. The two of them kept writing with my blood.

However, I’m not in the mood for reading. The flat creatures stomped over my body one after the other, as if I’m blocking their way. The space in the room is completely saturated, there’s no room for even an ant to crawl on. The creatures walk over me, as if they are blaming me for what I’ve done. As if they are striking me down with a whip. I am constantly kicked all over.

I tried fighting them, as a child would fight a strict educational environment.

But I have no strength to put up a likely fight. I am left to their whims.

“Huh, why do you hide it away with such care, locking it up inside your innermost treasure chest? It’s possible what you are hiding is completely worthless and boring, though?”

My eyes caught the shape of a bed. There is a funny-looking face of a man there.

It’s true. Something outrageously boring is hidden in this room.

Seemingly valuable, dripping with meaning, but in fact it means nothing at all… Does my heart contain something like that? Or perhaps, did I hide it there myself in the first place?

“Mere hiding, restraining—Maybe it will morph and twist into a poisonous monster, you know?”

“If you don’t eat it up in a hurry, it will go bad even when placed in the fridge!”

“What… What should I… do?”

All I wanted was to run away from this pain, from being blamed. I asked for their help.

“What should I do, then? Please…”

My head is in a blur after being criticized by someone who spoke in an all-knowing manner. I’m blamed for no reason at all. I couldn’t understand why. I can’t figure out the meaning of this.

I can only hope they would leave me alone.

“Eat them up before they go bad.”

“Eat em’ up and digest!”

“You cannot see the state of the psyche. And so, no one notices it even if it’s badly hurt. But first of all, you must accept the state of your psyche and swallow it down. For example, there are some people in this world who believes in the

existence of aliens. And so, to that person, aliens exist. He won’t deny their existence, but take the concept that aliens exist as granted, and in that condition, they think, listen, study, imagine, and try seeking out the truth—First you must understand your heart, and then figure out what to do next.”

“You can’t always keep it in your tummy! Swallow! You gotta swallow!”

“Or spit it out.”

“Or else it will rot in your tummy.”

“Since the mind cannot see it, you can only try putting it inside your mouth first. Your body and mind will determine for themselves if its edible or not. If it is digestible, maybe it will turn into nutrients. If you can’t deal with the problem yourself, go seek out an expert for help! Maybe he will make it all go well?”

“Cooking is love!”

I grew impatient at the bloody words that are growing messier by the second. I squeezed out of the cramped room.

I feel like I’ve finished reading a thick scholarly work that is hard to understand.

I couldn’t take it anymore. I would rather know nothing if knowing means I have to go through this much pain.

I ran away hurriedly, trailing blood behind me.

“Running away again this time?”

“But you can’t run when you are both connected!”

I took another peek at the words on the ground.

I crawled on like a newborn baby.

I want to see you.

I want to look at your face.

As if, I would go insane with you gone—

Chapter 23: A Picture of Hell

Did I, die?

Somehow, I felt I did.

My consciousness went blank all of a sudden, like entering a period of non-REM sleep. If all that lay ahead was pain, then everything can just end this way. The dreams that make me nauseous to the point of throwing up, I've had enough of this.

"Mmm… umm…"

But, I came back to life.

I woke up again. A strange expression, waking up from a dream.

In Jung's psychological theories, the ego and the self are clearly different. The self is the psyche that includes the collective unconscious, and all there is to a person. The ego is a part of the self that is exposed, a part of the psyche that is conscious.

When I awoke in reality, I'm using the consciousness on the surface; in dreams, the hidden subconscious takes over my ego. The purpose of the ego is to control the self completely. To embrace, digest, and dominate everything, including all that is associated with the consciousness and subconscious.

The reason you collect the items I call "effects", collecting the objects that hold special meaning in dreams, is possibly this. You need them to embrace and complete the psyche and a large part of the self, as well. Or maybe, you only collected them so your heart can be at peace?

But what is the meaning in all this, after collecting the effects, after your personality becomes whole? But somehow, I feel as if I have thought of this wrongly. Judging from the outcome of things, you did it to complete yourself, to piece up the heart, but somehow, there should be more….

“Where am… I?”

I have been thinking about you all this time, so I took little notice of my surroundings.

Although my reflexes are slow, I still took a look around. I want to explore a bit more in this realm of self which I usually ignored, unaware.

Even to this point, I still feel my body is in a tattered state. Blood, flesh, bones, all fall away from my body. Although I can’t witness it with my own eyes, I believe it to be a pitiful sight.

My blood keeps dripping from my open wounds.

But, the redness of this world is overwhelming to the point where I stopped noticing m blood marks.

“What is up with this place…”

I stood in the middle of a thin road, where all around me is colored in red and black, like I’m standing in a web of blood vessels. The body moves, the heart beats, even in dreams. This place reminds me of a circuit bard, full of wires, with biological functions.

The floors, walls, and the ceilings are soaked, seemingly, in blood. The roads are craped, with nearly no room to move around in.

Cramped and hot, I feel like I’m being boiled up in a pot.

This whole place makes me think of hell.

So, I’m dead already, then – Sentenced to rot inn hell for some heinous crime I committed.

But, what crime did I commit?

“…”

I shook my head.

This is a dream.

I have already witnessed this hellish scene several times before. This is the place where all worlds are connected. If you slacken and fall, this is where you will end up in. Perhaps, this is the biological trait that can be found in every human being—the depths of collective unconscious.

In every country, every legend, there is the concept of hell.

The shared nightmare of us humans.

“Hah—”

I took a deep breath and slowly regained calmness with my hands pressed to the wall for balance.

Then, I finally remembered.

I was dragged by the monochrome girls that looked like sisters—then thrown into that painful room and stamped on fiercely, till I blacked out. To run away from the pain of being the one to blame, I left my ego behind. I was tortured back then. Once humans encounter unbearable pain, they would ditch their rationality easily and turn into sheer monsters. They lose good judgement, rationality, and will answer any question truthfully. They would effortlessly believe in every thought, no matter how ridiculous the thought is.

That was the condition I was in.

That is why the words of the monochrome girls are still stuck in my head.

Although all they spoke was complete nonsense.

There isn’t any meaning to dreams.

The scenery starts changing again. Luckily, the monochrome girls did not seem to be following behind me. Beasts cannot read manga, nor understand the meaning behind words. Fun time is over. I’m alive with my heart beating in my chest. This is the realm of the living.

I thought of such things on this blood-sodden path.

I don’t want to keep focusing on this nightmare.

I must negotiate with myself, and learn more knowledge.

The clues are numerous. The objects with strong symbolism are scattered all over this dream. I want to inspect them closely, to deduct what's behind them, and have a breakthrough out of this ambiguous state.

However, interpreting dreams is no easy feat, even for an expert.

For example, say that a dog appeared in a dream.

Dogs usually symbolize horrible events.

That is because dogs are the most terrifying and dangerous animals that are closest to humans. They bark, and might also bite occasionally.

But that's just a general idea.

If the dreamer of the dream treats dogs as family, then dogs must be the symbol of happiness. On the other hand, to people who have been bitten by dogs, dogs are the symbol of fear, unhappiness, and distress. Also, different breeds of dogs hold different meanings. The different situations in which dogs appear also affect the meaning of the dream. Is the dreamer playing with the dog? Or being chased by the dog? Or maybe, turning into the dog—

You cannot see the psyche. It is weightless, and it cannot be observed under a microscope.

You cannot explain it in theory, nor in math or chemistry formulas.

What kind of life did that person have? What did that person go through, who are his or her acquaintances, what books and manga did that person read? What culture did that person grow up in? What are that person's beliefs? What kind of people are that person's parents? What people did that person love?

It's not enough just knowing these information, because dreams can still be influenced by memories unaware to the dreamer, making dream interpretation all the more difficult. Misdiagnosis and misses occur very often in the examination and curing process of the psyche. It's not a problem that can be easily dealt with using pills or undergoing surgery.

The matter must be carefully dealt with, the curing process must be in utmost care, every detail pieced together with great precision.

That was what I wanted to do. Symbols are everywhere, and luckily, I can see them. In this dream, there are countless symbols I can analyze.

Piece them together and analyze their meanings. Starting off, the Effect. They are deep impressions left in the psyche, important symbols that can affect their surroundings. They are like single pieces out of a jigsaw puzzle with a special picture printed onto its surface that can make people easily imagine the full picture of the puzzle. Effects are the key to unlocking the psyche.

Lamp. Cat. Knife. Fat. Long Hair.

I try to understand the meanings behind these effects by compiling all kinds of explanations.

The atmosphere of loneliness, isolation, and death suffuses your dreams. From this, a sad and depressing story can be pieced out. You, are a girl without a place to belong to in society. Unloved by parents, bullied at school, you are forced to run away from reality and hide deeper and deeper into your dreams…

You have nowhere else to go. You weep in pain and tried to run away from the world. You lock yourself in your room and refuse to go out. Only when you are lying in bed, dreaming, can you forget the horrors of reality—

That is a scene I can easily envision. Dreams are the mirrors of the heart. In this dream, almost everything is rotting in a grave state of decay. Hardly anything signifies happiness or joy. Your heart is badly sick. Tired, muddy, twisted.

But, I have no proof to back up this claim. No one can make sure that this theory is the correct answer.

I feel as if I’m missing something important. Something basic.

Because, if you are dreaming to escape pain, then there should be things that attract you in this dream—something safe, something spectacular, a joy that makes you wish to sink inside its bounds. But, no such joy is to be found, there is nothing here to save you from your pain. No end to this miserable, vile nightmare.

And there's – Yes. There's me. I do not exist in this theory. That girl in the hat and scarf, the monochrome sisters… They didn't choose you. Instead, they came after me. Why me, then? And, what am I?

I'm not even an Effect, I should be a pointless existence—To you, at least. Then, what meaning do I symbolize?

"I don't know—"

I groaned, having no spare time to think.

I hear the sound of footsteps.

Echoing loudly on this narrow blood-colored road.

A sound that I've heard countless times before.

You, are walking.

Walking in these maze-like tunnels, possibly mere steps away from me.

While I damaged my body into a pitiful state, almost suicidal, with my head kept in thinking ridiculous thoughts, you still wondered around as usual.

Rather like dolphins, which urban legend claims they keep half of their brains awake while swimming—So, when "I" stopped moving forward, perhaps "you" kept moving on.

Switching between the conscious and the subconscious, living alternately. That's the kind of relationship between you and I. So when I was running around aimlessly like a headless chicken, you also wondered around on your own. It's very rare for the conscious and the subconscious to meet. Is that why you can't see me, then? Could this be the reason I can never catch up with you?

The monochrome girls seemed to be hinting on this point…

Ah, I've thought too much. My head is in turmoil.

To put it simply, I want to see you.

I want to look at you.

It’s okay if we can never meet face to face, like the opposite sides of a coin. I only want to stay by your side. It makes me feel uncomfortable just being kept away from you. Even though the stomach and the spine aren’t technically linked together, but if they are split apart, the human body will die.

I followed the sound of footsteps and hurried forward.

I ran into dead ends a couple of times.

When that happens, I would switch directions anxiously. Humans can only think about what they know, they can only seek blindly on the road paved with knowledge. Sometimes people use books are the words of others to climb out of their caves, out of their tiny worlds.

At last, at the end of the road, I have found you.

You kept walking step after step in your own pace.

The twin braids dangle side to side at the back of your head.

Ah. I let out a sigh of relief and sank to the ground.

Here you are.

You’re right here.

Just this fact made me burst with happiness.

Yet, I only had a second of relief—before I shivered in horror.

Something moved beside you.

It’s that woman who I’ve seen multiple times in this dream. That woman, who’s thin and bony, wearing that plain colored shirt that shines of venom, whose nose is as sharp as a hook, not to mention the eyes that spin around in those gruesome sockets….

Although that woman gives out a feeling of disgust, she has been harmless all this time, wondering around without aim. However, currently, something is quite off. Her eyes are clouded over with purple mist, eyeballs whizzing in all

directions. She waves her arms and twitches her legs as if struggling for air. Her movements are stranger than usual.

As if she’s lost her mind.

As if she has become the symbol of wickedness.

You show no sign of notice at that woman who is lunging at you.

That violet, disgusting creature walked closer to you, as if she’s intent on hurting you.

No.

A strong impulse surged through me.

I won’t let anyone harm you. I won’t allow anyone to take you away.

Not even it is the will of God.

I sprinted forward with my tattered body, dripping with blood as I ran. I spread out my hands and locked the woman dead in my arms as if I was going to knock her, whose eyes are filled with bright red blood vessels, to the ground.

You turned around, as if you wanted to see what made the noise.

Then, you retreated hurriedly. Seeing your slow, wavering movements, I cried out in worry.

“Run away!”

Although, you probably won’t hear my voice.

Although, you possibly can’t see my body.

“Please live on—“

I felt it from the bottom of my heart.

I wanted to do something for you. I want to fulfill all your desires. But, I was unable to do so. I regretted this all along, and wanted to make up for my crimes.

It’s alright even if I sacrifice myself for you, even if my efforts are not reciprocated.

If I don’t have a place of existence in this dream, it doesn’t bother me the least.

Maybe there isn’t much meaning for action in dreams.

Perhaps I can’t change any reality.

Even so, I—

With a flash, the purple eyed woman gripped me by the neck and lifted me off the ground impatiently. Her mouth emitted high-pitched shrieks as her strange eyes stared straight at me. She lifts me up, spraying my face with her saliva. I was crushed on the wall, thrashing in pain.

What they mean by strangulation is not death by asphyxiation. Instead, death is caused from the lack of blood in the brain. The pressure on the neck stops the flow of blood from reaching the brain. If there is no oxygen, the brain cannot work. It will be left to die, unable to even concoct a dream.

My vision grew dim. The dream starts folding up and growing small, slowing pulling away and then out of reach.

You walked away, without looking back.

I seem to remember now, what was it that braids symbolize.

Chapter 24: Revolving Lantern

Was I dreaming?

I was strangled by a woman with round purple eyes, and consequently, lost conscious – in the blink of an eye, I had the fleeting sensation of seeing my life flash before my eyes.

My self-awareness grew vague. Not knowing why, I saw my transparent self running after you, who should have escaped the woman by now.

The boundaries between you and I grew blurrier.

Is this dream yours? Or could the dream be, mine?

You walked forward, upon these hellish roads towards that solemn door. It loomed before you, obsidian black, coffin-like. If that is the gate leading to hell, then, according to Dante Alighieri's Inferno, the words carved upon that gate must be "Leave behind all hope, you who enter" .

I want to grab your hand and stop you from moving forward, but I am held back by that woman, who seemed to be the very incarnate of vileness. Bounded in her grasp, I am unable to move. It would be meaningless to reach out a hand at your direction, seeing as I cannot reach out anymore.

Helpless, I can only witness your figure walking further away from me.

You entered those doors and stepped over to the other side, not suspecting a thing.

You entered these doors and stepped over to the other side fearlessly.

Like a newborn baby who doesn't know how to protect herself.

You walked on.

Into the pitch-black darkness where countless lampposts are lit.

Since there are objects that are lit up from the glow of the lamplight, there are also things that disappear from the light. Such as the gaze of others. There are some eyes that take interest in you, even when bathed in darkness. Their eyes emit light as lampposts do. However, the streetlamps started going out one after the other, and the light dies away.

You are quite alone in the surrounding darkness.

However, something glowed warmly by your side. Its light twinkles, a curious lamp that walks around. The tiny lamp looked after you, spreading out warmth at your side. You hug it close to your body joyously, and have it light your way forward.

It’s the only thing you can rely on at this point.

You kept walking.

…And lost your way again in the sea of trees that is drenched with the stench of death. The featureless trees that encircled you seem to symbolize other people—You have walked straight into their embrace. The trees grew thickly. A few eyeballs are grown on the treetops, and stared at you evilly. Perhaps they are simply staring out of curiosity, or, rather out of lewd thoughts.

You light the path with the lamp and walked onwards.

Darkness surged ahead, where the hue of the lamp cannot reach.

The eyeballs start to accumulate and stare right at you. Before this moment, no one paid much attention to you, yet all of a sudden, you have become the center of attention. Taken aback, you lowered your head out of embarrassment. This situation resembles a funeral. Even people who are neglected in society will have their own fair share of attention at their own funeral.

At last, to become the star of the show, to have people weep over them. Although, the attention has come far too late.

How capricious.

Amidst the sea of trees, the unsettling sound of bells clamored out from the jellyfish-shaped creature that looked like viscera glued together. The drone of the

bells made the scene resemble a funeral even more.

The whole atmosphere is haunted with the hint of death. The mournful feeling is sickening.

At last, the forest disappeared behind your passing figure as an ancient train somehow appeared in front of you. It was a shabby, rusty vehicle that broke apart in pieces, a deserted train that hasn't been used for years. It rested on broken rails that seemed impossible to lead to anywhere.

In dreams, vehicles of transportation are symbols of leaving for another world.

Did you wish to ride on the train and head to some other place?

Those uncomfortable stares that once surrounded you are now all gone. No one is by your side any longer. You are going all alone to that one place where no one wants to reach.

You opened the doors, alone, and stepped into the compartment.

As you set your feet inside the train, the engine roared back to life, making clanking noises. Your twin braids shook along with the resurrected train, not knowing where this train will lead you.

Seats are arranged inside. Creatures that are supposedly passengers occupy some of the seats. There are some creatures in complete darkness, the same as the girl with the cap and the scarf— Unable to be seen, because it is unrecognizable, quite like a child that died before its maker can give it facial features. Sitting beside the black creature is a disfigured creature that looked like an eyeball with legs attached.

In an innocent air, they kicked their legs back and forth.

Just like children. You found an empty seat between these strangely creepy children and sat down.

Perhaps the train was taking too much time. You felt bored of the journey and hopped down the chair, pushed open the door, and stepped outside.

That black creature waved its hand at you in farewell. The disfigured eyeball

smiled alongside.

Walking a little longer, you reached a river.

It was a wide river, so deep you cannot see its bottom. Its waters looked chilly, as dim colors flashed on the surface. It felt hard to cross the river with the power of just one person.

It looked like the diverging line between life and death—The River of Three Crossings.

A bridge is built upon the river. You walk towards it. Beside you, a group of people with the faces of the dead, wearing white, ghost like garments stood nearby. As if they are the spirits of the dead failing to reach the afterlife, and are stuck o linger on the riverbank….

You ignored their existence and continued walking on.

Crossing the bridge, over the waters.

No. You can’t.

Come back.

Don’t cross over.

I wanted to yell at you, begging you to turn around. Yet, there is nothing I can do.

The surface is vast, the bridge stretches to places I don’t know where. The waters reveal the blurry shadows of coral and dead fishes. Their sizes are gigantic, like towns submerged under the flood. Like the remains of a broken world after emerging from the apocalypse. Everything destroyed, collapsed. It’s the end for all existing life.

The world ends at this point.

A scene of complete devastation.

At last, you crossed to the other side.

There, pieces of withered bark are stuck in the earth.

Humans grow trees inside their hearts— the tree of the self. By using knowledge and experience, emotions and love as nutrients, they cultivate the tree with care. For all humans, not two trees are identical. What flowers will it bloom, what fruits will it bear; what does it value, what makes it grow; what does it deem as poison, what poisons does it contain; how far can it reach its branches towards the heavens?

However, all there remains is dead wood.

Tired, worn out. Hearts that died in the process.

You, touched the dead bark gently.

You tried leaning onto them.

Yet, a symbol of evil is near the dead trees—a dragon. He poked out its strange, gigantic head out of a water hole. He sprays out flames, lighting you up along with the trees. You burned bright, incandescent.

Like a scene out of a witch trial.

Like Jeanne d’Arc burnt on the stake.

Although she saved the world, she’s seen as a wicked witch and is consequently flung into the flames

You disappear like dust disintegrating in a red-hot stove.

And that’s when I remembered the fact that you have already died.

Chapter 25: The Interpretation of Dreams

I dreamt a dream.

“Sure it’s a dream. All of it is a dream… Dreams belong to the world of subconscious; it is the other self you peek into—the inner self. That chance is hard to come by. Dreaming is a must-have element for examining your sick heart, no, to cure your un-seeable un-touchable psyche.”

Someone who stood before me spoke out these deep words.

Possibly a man, I am only certain of this—He looked like an over-boiled, white, putty-like existence. That face that seemed steps away from me is melted together with a white coat that fluttered in the wind. His sight is as disturbing as that of a ghost.

So. It seems I’m awake again.

Here is reality. Or at least, the reality that people deem it to be so.

The scene I witnessed after I’m pushed down from a high place by the girl in a hat and scarf, the place I saw momentarily when forced awake… I am now back in that suffocating place. In the dream, I was choked at the throat by that woman with the whizzing eyeballs, and then lost consciousness—

When I woke for the second time, I’m already here, face to face with that white piece of clay.

I was strangled to death in that dream…It should be so. In movies, characters that die in dreams often go into a brain-dead or persistent vegetative state. After the psyche and conscious is killed, the body becomes a mere shell. Left behind by the soul, the lifeless body is completely worthless.

Yet, in actuality, death, or being killed in dreams isn’t a rare occurrence at all. Although the brain-dead condition could be a serious problem, such things won’t actually happen at all. In dreams, death is the Deus ex Machina to end this

dreamland-setting play—Death becomes a positive sign that symbolizes rebirth into a new life.

Dream and subconscious are the inner side of the dual personality, a personality so different from the one you are accustomed to that it feels like a different person altogether. It's the Mr Hyde to Mr Jekyll. Dying in dreams has no impact on reality. The act can also be considered as spewing out poisonous pus, making people feel much better afterwards. Dying in dreams can also clean away fears and uneasiness.

Though that may be the case, death is by no means pleasant. The inner personality is still a part of the whole self. The experience of death is a very heavy burden. Not to mention I'm killed in the most merciless and gruesome way. I was shocked to find myself still alive after. Even now, my heart races non-stop. I cannot calm myself down with cold sweat pouring out of my pores.

But, it is exactly because I died in dreams so that I can wake up I reality.

The game is over. Before I flip the switch of the world of dreams on, I can remain only in the real world. To me, reality is overwhelmingly vivid, it's startling. The loud, grinding noise of the flowing air, the friction of cloth, the drone of conversations… even the pressure of air on my skin is unbearable.

My body weights me down, every exhale becomes a pant. I feel like a stranded fish.

If waking up is this depressing, this painful—Staying in the nightmare is better.

"Examining dreams is the best way to cure the heart. Through analyzing and examining the contents of dreams and what appears in it, we can figure out the way of solving your problems. That's the speediest way. Yet, the context of dreams is very hard to confide to others. That's why curing the sickness of the heart is so difficult.

As I groaned, the man with a blurry outline kept speaking.

Saying words that held empty meaning to me.

"The dreams of other people are always boring. No matter how exciting he dream is to the dreamer, it often sounds like pure gibberish to the listener, like

listening to the language of another country. In comparison, topics about the weather or baseball is much more fun, is easier to understand, and has underlying rules. They are way easier to relate to."

The man, possibly a doctor, kept talking eloquently.

I have no strength to give a witty retort, thus the whole scene felt like his own personal lecture.

"Confiding your own dreams to others is extremely difficult. The dream is a part of your subconscious, the inner personality. Although you are connected to it, it is still hard to be understood."

He explained this to me one-sidedly. I am not yet ready to receive words from other people, and so his words flowed through my ears tracelessly like a whooshing breeze. My brain is woozy, as if I overslept. I haven't understood a single word he said.

"It's like reading a novel written by a friend. Or the feeling you get in Literature class, when the teacher asks the class,' please explain the inner emotions of the author when writing down this article'. Everyone would get baffled by this, and honestly, what's the whole point of that teaching method? Who knows what is going on in the author's head when he is writing? Why, mostly he's thinking about taxes and or the approaching deadline or some other boring stuff of that variety. But actually, no, that is not the case. The author's soul resides in the novel. And the very point of literature class is for us to read, understand, and deduct hidden meanings."

What on earth is he saying?

I have no interest in his words.

"Then how do you get good grades in literature class? I have a friend who happens to be a novelist, and he says the key is to read a lot of random books and then write a lot of stories while feeling like a total idiot. He kept at it. In the end, he managed to get good grades even when he didn't put in much time studying at school."

The man, who is supposed to be a doctor, reminisced happily.

In a very roundabout manner of speech.

I must be bad at literature class in thinking that way.

“After going through tons of reading and the healthy habit of writing, you’ll get to the point of the article. You’ll understand the heart of the author. You can relate to the fragments of another person’s heart. In psychology, there is a way to replicate a certain state like that, and that is what we call ‘art therapy’.”

Right, I’m undergoing therapy.

Because my heart is sick.

I dreams, I’m dominated by my inner personality, by someone else. But, after waking up, in the real world, I will recover my own self, and gain back control. In the meantime, the things I have forgotten while dreaming—memories, emotions, knowledge…will come surging back to me in tides.

Little by little, I recalled my experience of growing up as a kid, the place and condition I am currently in, along with all the details of my real life. The baton once passes to my subconscious is now back in my own hands. This time, it’s my turn to run, although I cannot control my body too well, after my long slumber.

Right now, my brain is like a recently powered on computer, all foggy from the sleeping, thus unable to think clearly.

My heart was sick, so I took therapy.

Reading books on the subject is an important step of therapy, that’s why I read books on psychology, and wrote down the contents of my dream on my diary as much as I can recall, which I will have to discuss the contents of the dream with my psychologist.

What takes place now, is the discussion.

Through conversing with my doctor, I gradually reveal my heart in the process. Talking with others will sculpt out the shape of my heart. From my reactions and the contents of speech, the doctor will gain enough evidence to deduct the ambiguous state of my dream, hence understanding my heart.

However, the tasks require much willpower. We can hardly understand ourselves, and decoding the subconscious of other people is even harder. Even the testimony of a lovey-dovey wife, or a blood brother, there will still be missing pieces.

Although the situation differs on the level of trust patients have in their doctors, often, people lie when they are asked intimate questions. They lie to protect their selves intact, to keep their personality safe. Or maybe, they lie because they are used to lying, or that they are in a bad mood. Fake evidence always exists.

And so, conversations must be held again and again. To go through the same questions over and over, like an interrogation. If conversing doesn't work out for the patient, then they will change to another method.

"What they call by art therapy, is to create. Such as writing novels or drawing manga. However, the most useful method is the sandplay method, the therapy you are taking right now."

I am in a room that resembled a hospital room.

I sat up in bed with a large box place on my legs. It's large enough to wrap my arms around its edges.

In the box, different items re arranged freely. To determine the state of the heart by observing the positions of the items in the box… This is what people call sandplay therapy. You put the items you like in the place you chose to put it. The act is simple, even children can do that. There is no need for writing or coloring, acts that require special knowledge. This is a very creative activity.

Therefore, sandplay therapy is the one treatment that works on all patients.

General examinations require the use of medical equipments, or an inquiry with the doctor face to face. But now, although the doctor is right beside me, I am sitting freely in bed. Somehow, this doesn't feel like taking treatment.

The feeling of freedom helps the patient relax. Nervousness causes the psyche to close up, to make people wear unnecessary masks to hide their true intentions. Peeling off the masks and searching deep into the human psyche is very hard work.

I sat up in bed, in a condition dangerously close to sleep.

Intent to reach deeper into my hart, deep inside the subconscious.

In the center of my box, a little doll of a girl is placed.

I held that doll at its waist, making her walk around the box. I cannot decide where to place her. My cute little doll with twin braids… The doll isn't a prop from the sandplay therapy; instead, it is my cherished toy from childhood.

Although I can't recall past memories too clearly.

I felt fuzzy, as if the memory belonged to someone else.

"Yes, yes. That's right."

The doctor's voice comes as a disturbance to me. I frowned slightly.

I placed the doll in the very center of the box, and, surrounding it, I placed all kinds of things. On after the other, arranged neat and tidy. Frogs, midgets… It's strange to find the same things I call "Effects" in my dreams here in this box.

That was the first thought that popped into my head.

Then, after filling in half the box, I asked the doctor,

"What mental state does this represent?"

I want to know the correct answer. I want to ease myself, so I asked.

"Who knows?" Replied the doctor ambiguously, then hurried me on.

I felt wildly suspicious. I sensed that someone is staring at my every movement. I don't wat to let others see the Effects, since they are so dear to you— So I wrapped them up in ribbons, loo after loop. Carefully, tightly. Like cocoons, like eggs.

"What… What are you doing?"

This time, the doctor asks me a question for a change.

While he wouldn’t reply my question in the first place.

I felt very unsatisfied by this, and kept my mouth shut.

To hide your important things secretly, carefully like this, keeping them inside eggs—The acct comes very natural to me.

Around you, I have arranged a circle of effects—eggs. Your most important things.

Hmm.

Very, harmonious.

“A lot of colorful eggs. They’re pretty. There’s a holy feeling to it. Like Easter Eggs. Easter—Resurrection. Oh, hmm…”

I stared at the doctor’s face. He looked as if he had understood something.

But the doctor is completely unmoved by my hard stare, and said to me,

“I read your story. It was truly intriguing.”

In the hands of the doctor lay an open diary.

A dream diary.

On it, meaningless arrangements of letters with no central point are scribbled. The time sequence is also mixed up. After all, I’ve only written what I saw in my dreams, and what I remembered afterwards, hence there is no styling to it. It’s not a very interesting read. After all, I am no novelist.

“You don’t have to imitate the writing style of a novelist. Just write down sincerely what you saw, like composing an essay. To use an art metaphor, it’s like sketching or life drawing. What’s important is the accuracy and amount. The contents of dreams are quickly forgotten, so it’s very difficult to jolt it all down accurately. You don’t need any writing skill. Just let me know what you’ve seen and how you felt.”

“My dreams, my heart—”

I can’t help asking again.

“How can you interpret it?”

“Compared to my advice, we should listen more about your thoughts—This is essential, you know.”

“…”

Hearing his words, I unwillingly thought with my own heart.

And started remembering.

What I’ve seen, heard, and felt in dreams.

“I—”

The dream had already faded away. It’s very difficult to memorize it after waking up in reality.

Despite this, I tried hard to dig them out.

“In my dreams, I kept chasing after a girl who wondered alone. That child, she seemed to be collecting something. No, maybe she wasn’t collecting. She could be just walking around, having nothing else to do. But I think she’s collecting items that are scattered all around the heart, around the subconscious, special—important things.”

I called those things, effects.

Besides collecting effects, she did not seem to have any other purpose in the dream.

You kept walking, collecting Effects you found on the way.

“Collecting items that are important to the psyche. I think, this act represents deep meaning. I wanted to collect the fragments of my heart, which had broken into pieces, and bring them back together like finishing a jigsaw puzzle. To complete it. That’s what I think. Collect the broken pieces of my heart, making it whole again, bring back my Self, that’s my purpose—”

I can’t explain myself well. I grew anxious over this.

“Wanting to be treated, wanting to cure my sickened heart, I think that’s the kind of feeling it symbolizes. Because it’s too painful, I don’t want to keep on being sick. I want to be healthy again, go back to being Whole. That’s why I want to collect the broken, missing pieces—“

“Sure, it’s possible.”

The doctor still wouldn’t give me a straightforward answer.

He’s being cautious. The treatment of the psyche is not something that can be easily solved by prescribing pills or preforming surgery. After all, the hearts of people are all different, and are constituted with different elements. To cure the heart, one must diagnose the heart carefully firsthand.

“But it’s great if that is the case. It means you have an optimistic attitude. You want to get back on your feet, you yearn to be cured. That’s the positiveness psychological therapy need.”

Although he sounded like complimenting a student who answered correctly, it felt more like a mollifying act somehow.

So spoke the doctor.

“You cannot perform surgery on the heart. There’s little I can do, it’s all up to you. If you want to bring back your healthy psyche, then it’s the best.”

His reaction only unnerves me more.

I have answered the correct words, the desired answer. But, could my answer be, somehow, insincere? Could it be I gave him what he wanted to hear because I wanted the conversation to end?

Do I really want to restore my psyche back to health?

It that my true voice?

Or, is there something gigantic hidden inside me, something of extreme importance locked inside my heart?

“I hope you would disarm yourself before me.”

The doctor murmured, as if seeing right through me.

He touches the hard shell, of my heart, sadly. The shell that I can do nothing about. I have the feeling that I haven’t opened up completely yet.

“I am no enemy of yours. I don’t want to hurt you. I want to cure you, to do what’s best for you. And to achieve this, I hope you will open your heart up to me in return. Or at least, let me touch it, let me place the stethoscope on it. Or else I can’t see anything, nor can I help curing you.”

“Didn’t I show you everything already?”

I retorted rather angrily.

Panic. Anxiety. I do not understand why I am reacting to his words like this.

“I’ve already wrote down a lot of pages, haven’t I? I wrote in that diary, and you’ve read it already. I’ve tried all sorts of methods, so that you can see into my heart. I’ve opened my heart wide open, and left it inside your hands.” Creation. Conversation. Interpretation of dreams.

All the ways to cure the heart, I’ve tried them all.

If that doesn’t represent my desire to recover, then what can?

“Is that the truth?”

The doctor asked in a low voice. I felt a pang of pain that felt as if my foot is stomped on.

“Have you really shown me all there is to see?”

The voice contained more sadness than blame.

“You still have something important hidden from me. You protect it, you cover up for it, you shield the wounds with your hands. It must hurt terribly, doesn’t it? But if you don’t allow me to examine it, to touch that wound, I cannot help in curing you.”

His voice is controlled, but layered with pressure that is directed towards me.

The doctor wanted to get closer to my heart. He wanted to reach out his hand to it, but I despised that.

“Collecting the pieces of the heart is an admirable feat. It’s Jung’s ideal to integrate all the elements of the psyche, conscious and subconscious included, to gain the true Self. The world, the one and only undividable self. To control not only the ego on the surface, but the complete psyche. Jung calls this individuation, believing it to be the final purpose of the psyche, an ideal.”

The psychology terms the doctor spoke of, I’ve heard of them all. I read about them in a book. I read because I wanted to learn more knowledge, all to regain the peace of the heart.

To be able to flee from this pain.

“You wonder around in the subconscious, collecting the symbols that are full of meaning to you. But, let’s be honest, you’ve finished collecting the effects already, there shouldn’t be anymore left in the dream, left in your heart by now.”

That’s right.

The search in the dreams is all over.

The locations of every item, I know them all.

I have organized and understood my heart, I’ve done all there is to be done.

There’s nothing more for me to do.

“But, if your goal is already complete—If you have already collected all the fragments and pieced your heart back up together, you should be relieved by this point. You should have no anxiety, no fear, no pain. But, even now, I sense you still fear something.”

I can grasp the meaning of these words.

He’s correct. If the puzzle’s pieced up, if all the fragments are collected into a complete picture, then the journey should have been over. There should be no

weight left on my shoulders. The only feeling left behind should be contentment.

Yet, I cannot be calmed down.

Ass if there is something I haven't finished yet.

"Could it be that this diary is unfinished? Is there a continuation to this?"

The doctor pointed to the last few blank pages of the notebook that recorded my dreams.

"Could there be other doors left unopened? More territories left unexplored?"

I felt offended by this remark, and fixed my stare somewhere else.

Then, I gazed down at the box sitting on my lap.

Around the doll that looks just like you, is a circle of eggs. It looked as if you have discarded the eggs. Even though you've took great effort to collect all the Effects, but now, they seem like they don't belong to you, as if they are unneeded.

Collect the fragments of the heart. Combine the heart back into one.

Isn't that the final purpose of the heart?

Then why, would you act as if you are rejecting this idea?

Don't you want to be cured? Wasn't it your wish to have peace? Have I been misreading what you wanted to accomplish all along? Are you just running around purposelessly, wasting energy?

There is something I've understood wrongly. Something basic.

I'm still hiding something.

"Your story is really interesting. I hardly meet people who can describe their dreams in such lux details. But, evidently, it's not enough. There are still missing parts. Some parts of your dreams are described so lavishly, but some parts are intentionally left out. The parts you shied away from makes me take notice."

The doctor’s voice is full of sorrow.

To make contact with the hearts of others is a tough job. Invisible to the eye, different hearts crash, wound, and bleed. There is no way to stay at a safe place while cutting off the afflicted parts, medicating the pain. The doctor has to merge with the patient, they feel as one, empathize, the two hearts connected—they twist and wound and tire together.

That’s why the doctor hopes the patient can rise to their own feet through their own power.

That is the most ideal way to solve the problem without anyone getting hurt.

“I don’t think you are making up the story. But you’ve left out the most important part. That’s why the story gets so fractured, like a book with half its pages blackened out. You re hiding away, unconsciously, the most important truth that is to you.”

Then, words that cut like a plunge of a knife.

Like making an incisive cut with a scalpel, the doctor asked aloud,

“Why isn’t there□□□in your dream?”

I can’t hear that word.

My brain, my psyche, they won’t acknowledge the existence of that word.

If I accepted it, my heart would blow up into smithereens. I’ll black out from the loss of blood. That’s why, the heart created a shell to protect itself. That word, and all that is connected to it, is blocked away.

But, it’s only hidden away. It is still somewhere deep in my heart.

I can’t give it up completely.

Because, that’s something very important to me, an organ essential to my survival. It hurt. The searing pain came bursting outward.

I started gasping for air.

“Gahhh. Ahhhhh.”

As if, I have to remember everything.

Everything, needs to be linked back up.

The scenes that flash repetitively in my head… The girl in the cap and scarf. The words spoken by the monochrome girls. The swaying twin braids. The numerous effects, what they do. All the things I have encountered in the dream while chasing after you, have their own meaning. Only, I have disregarded them all along.

I only pretended I haven’t seen a thing.

Covering up my wounds with my hands, pretending that there’s nothing here. I wasn’t hurt in the first place. I’m perfectly fine… Such are the words I used to hypnotize myself.

Blood pours out from my heart. This time, there’s no longer a way to hide it.

I held the box tightly in my arms.

I don’t want to see it. I don’t want to see the state of my heart. I refuse to recognize it, to understand it.

I let out a sharp wail.

I grabbed the doll out from the box, the doll that looked just like you.

And flung it with full force to the ground.

The smash made the old doll fall apart, revealing cotton under its faded cloth.

Resembling a person with their viscera leaking out from their bodies.

As if fallen to death from a very high place.

“This is the final ending this is the continuation of the diary all is over now let the curtain FALL DOWN! Fall down fell down onto the ground and died aborted flowing out and away gone gone ahhhHHHHHHHHHHHHH”

I screamed, taken over by an uncontrollable fierceness, as the strong, ugly feelings roared.

Everything that I've left hidden away in my subconsciousness came bursting out from their hiding place and screeched in hysteria.

The doctor stood up in a flash and shook my shoulders forcefully while calling out my name. The nurses came rushing in as well, having heard the turmoil from outside. They tried pinning my down. The back of my head bumped onto something, and my vision swayed. My consciousness seemed to be drifting away again.

Enough of this. I don't want to dream anymore. Nothing can save me there now.

There's nothing left but despair.

Because, you are not there anymore.

You cannot be found at anyplace.

I've walked so far, searched for so long, but you're not inside my dreams.

Chapter 26: Free Association Technique

I woke again.

I don’t want to dream anymore.

Thus I remember. The short moment of the dream I witnessed was doused in blood. Flying apart. The miserable stench of blood. You jumped off from your high-up balcony. And I, was unable to stop any of this from happening.

You fell, gathering speed, and contacted the ground.

Mangled, mutilated, an instant death.

Aborted, fallen down, dead.

Standing near your corpse that resembled the dirty carcass of a frog ran over by a car, I sobbed. I cried, I wept… That’s all there was to the dream. That is the ending. I have seen the same scene over and over and over, for countless times. I kept watching. Seeing you lying in a pool of blood, with your internal organs squished out of your body.

Mournful bells rang near my ears.

That is the end.

That is the ending of my dream.

The point where the dream progresses no more.

However, reality cannot be halted. For countless times I have witnessed the same dream, and woke in terror, soaked in cold sweat. Then, I would sob my heart out in the realm of reality. I went over the same experiences again and again. My dream, my subconscious is trapped in that one scene and stopped operating, dying there.

Yet, in real life, I’m still breathing, still metabolizing.

I can only choose to live on.

“And now, we will start the treatment. It’s called the free association technique. It’s a very common method in psychology, so I’m thinking you’ve heard of it somewhere.”

I’m already bone tired from the death imagery that looped in my head.

The voice of the doctor sounded far away.

“You’ve shown a part of what you hid in your heart. By revealing this is enough to make your heart fall apart. You hid it all along, to protect it. Out of self-defense. If I pulled it out by force, your heart might collapse. You would then notice your wounds, your pain, and then lose your mind from it.”

I t seemed that my breakdowns brought them trouble.

My naked arm and fingers are covered in bandages and medicine. As if I had destroyed everything around me, ripped apart reality, and consequentially bled from the repercussion.

The doctor standing in front of me is covered in bloody bandages, as if cut by a kitchen knife. Although his outline is blurred as usual, I can see scratch marks on his face. Perhaps I have scratched him in my state of hysteria.

In this process of psychological therapy, our hearts have collided together, and both are worn out as a result.

Both of us are hurt, blood dripping from the wounds.

“I might have gotten a little impatient back then. I apologize for hat. I should have cured you in a more cautious method. It’s as if I have performed surgery on you without a blood bag ready a hand, so it’s normal of you to reject it. You heart protected yourself instinctively. Turns out, I’m no longer the doctor, but the enemy who’s hurting you. That’s why I was attacked by you. It’s entirely my fault. You don’t have to feel bad about it.”

After the doctor explained this to me patiently, he turned around and looked at me.

“Free association technique is only a method for examination. You won’t need to make contact with anything, and there won’t be any pressure on your psyche, either… It’s only to detect the condition of your psyche, like taking an x-ray. I want to cure you, to bring your life back to the peaceful state it used to be, because that is the final goal of the psyche. I want to help you. That’s why I have to be careful, like observing from a microscope, careful not to hurt you in the process.”

I nodded my head in the haze.

I felt tired.

Every time I close my eyes, your bloody corpse would appear in my mind. Spraying blood, organs. The horrifying imagery of death refuses to fade away, it haunts me relentlessly. Worn out and frail, I have no strength to do anything.

All there is left for me to do is nod and follow the doctor’s orders. As if I am a nodding machine.

“Free association method is easy to understand. I will give you a word, and observe what kind of reactions you would have towards it, what kind of association you would make—The process will go on like this. It’s easy, like taking a questionnaire. No strings attached, so there’s no need to get nervous over it.”

The doctor explained to me with care.

Somehow, I felt guilty towards him. People like me don’t deserve such effort from him. However, to think of it another way, it’s part of their job as doctors to put effort in their work.

Painful, cruel, a job with no reward.

“Now, I will give you a hundred words. I hope you would tell me what you think of the word, and what you associate to the word one by one. I will them sculpt the condition of your heart through your answers. Although it’s a little time-consuming, it’s certainly worth the effort. Word association is a very effective method to grasp the whole psychological condition, statistically speaking.”

I nodded along like a doll.

I'll do anything to be freed from that nightmare.

"This isn't a test in school, so there's no correct answer, no scores. No one will blame you if you thought of a strange answer. It doesn't mean you are helpless. On the contrary, if you think of pretty answers, no one would be praising you. This is no debate contest. If you can't think of anything, you can refuse to answer. Silence also counts as an answer."

The doctor seemed to be explaining the rules of a game.

I listened, not making a sound.

At the moment, I have nearly no judgement.

"I will give you the words really quickly, without any time for you to think it over. Then I'll determine your mental state from your answers, answering speed, expression, tone of speech and other such factors. If you feel uncomfortable in the process, tell me. No need to get nervous over this. Just take it as an intermission game without anyone winning or losing—"

So, let's begin.

Ending his speech, the doctor started the free association therapy.

And I am underprepared.

Underprepared, having no strength to make an effort. I feel like an animal that reacts to outer stimulus through pure instinct.

"What do you think of when you hear the word 'head'?"

I paused for a moment after hearing the doctor's words.

Head. What comes to my mind. The first thing I think of is your head—The swinging twin braids.

"You don't have to force yourself to think. Just tell me the first thing you thought of."

The doctor spoke calmly. So, I answered, as if speaking for the first time in my life.

“Human heads.”

I answered, stuttering.

Your head. Your head cut off from your body. That is the image that came to me.

But that answer is far too gruesome. So I denied that answer frantically, ignoring the imagery of death that accompanied it.

“I mean, human hair. Dyed hair. Hair dying is really popular recently, so that’s what I thought of that. Um, when I was younger—Back then, I liked changing hairstyles, experimenting with my hair. Sometimes I dyed it gold, sometimes I wore it long, and also used to keep straight hair back then. Hey, is it okay for me to just say whatever I think of or—”

“’Green’?”

Not responding to my question, the doctor skipped to the next word.

I had the feeling that he saw through me trying to cover up my previous answer, so I blushed.

But, even my attitude during answering is part of the material for observation, is that right?

Feeling a little uncomfortable, I kept on answering.

“A sea of trees.”

What came to my mind, was the sea of trees I passed through while chasing after you. Again, this answer is laced with death… It distresses me that I cannot leave that imagery behind me. Wouldn’t it be a lot better if I said I thought of frogs or some other answer? At least the other answers have a sense of happiness attached to them.

However, I have no time to think.

New words are thrown at me after the other, and I can only respond to these ambiguous symbolic words through sheer instinct. The process repeats. Gradually, my answers become spinal reflexes. Maybe that is the point of the whole association test, for me to answer meaningless answers—answers that came from the subconscious.

As if I am in a dream.

“’Window’?”

“Window…? That child, you… I look at you through the window. I can only look at you with a window in between us.”

“’Groups’?”

“School, I think. Groups and groups of faceless people, forming their little cliques.”

“’Cooking’?”

“Kitchen knife. But knives are dangerous, they can be used to hurt people.”

“’Traveling’?”

“Traveling. I want to travel. I want to go to all sorts of places.”

“’Blue’?”

“Um, haven’t we went through this already? Or was that word green…? If green is the sea of trees, then blue should represent the sea?”

“’Thorn’?”

“Haven’t you asked this already?”

“’Death’?”

“……”

“’Money’?”

“You can’t live without it, without money.”

“’Birds’?”

“I hate birds… They are horrible. Their cries, the eyes.”

“’Frogs’?”

“Wasn’t there a fairytale about a bragging frog? The one that had its head burst open because it inhaled too much air? Pretty silly, wasn’t it? I liked that story.”

“’Children’?”

“……”

“’Marriage’?”

“……”

“’Home’?”

“The place to return to. Although no matter how tidily the rooms are cleaned, or how nice the furnishing is done, no one will ever come to visit.”

“’Drawing’?”

“Compared to drawing, I like reading better.”

“’Family’?”

“……”

“Happiness’?”

“I don’t get it… I don’t get it anymore.”

“”Stork”?”

“I told you I hate birds!”

“‘Kissing’?”

“Filthy, disgusting. Why do you keep on saying such awful things!”

“’Door’?”

“’Alien’?”

Suddenly, a strangeness fell over the scene.

I haven’t replied to the previous word, but a new word is thrown at me.

In the voice that repeated in a certain tempo, a discordant note is mixed within.

Although I’m falling between sleeping and waking, I heard it clearly.

That word was very strange. I know what the free association technique is. I’ve read about it in books. But I remember that no such word was included in the list —I lifted my head in surprise.

Then, I saw it.

Chapter 27: Spaceship

Could I be, dreaming?

This is too surreal.

My vision swirled, changing the surrounding scenery in the blink of an eye. It's bizarre how everything before my eyes changed so drastically.

I should have been taking the free association therapy, due to the sickness of my heart. But, while I was answering the boring questions—Or should I say, responding through sheer reflex at the words thrown at me in a set pace, my subconscious came silently surging upwards to the surface.

It's like driving a car down a highway.

Or doing repetitive, monotonous work.

Without my noticing , I've entered a hypnotic-like state—As if dreams have leaked out of my heart and covered up reality. As if, I'm seeing a daydream with my wide open eyes.

Or did I sink into a dream because of this boredom?

In front of me, stood an incredible person.

Before this moment, it, that person, was supposed to be the doctor. The doctor that cures illnesses and ailments, the teacher that will guide my way. Perhaps, even, the Sensei that can save me—

"Excuse me, sensei? Are you, Sensei?"

I asked.

Even though it seemed impossible to communicate with 'it'.

I'm filled up with panic.

It had the form of a tall, slender man. In this sense, it does resemble the doctor who I spoke to not so long ago. However, figuratively speaking, although the two of them wore the same mask, the wearers of the mask are completely different people—The essence of their existences varies greatly at crucial points.

Turning into something different, with its original form unknowable.

Clearly, it is not a normal human.

Sure, it’s got a pair of eyes. Arms and legs, as well. The outline is that of a human, too.

Yet, the other details are too casually made. On its face, there aren’t any features aside from the eyes. No mouth, no nose, and no ears. The eyes have a hard, solid feeling to them, like the eyes of insects. One cannot tell where the eyes are focusing at. The look of the eyes is suspicious to the point where one has doubtful thoughts of if whether they truly are eyes.

Although there is a substance that looks like hair, but it is as flat as piece of seaweed stuck onto the skull, there is no dimension to it at all. Its body is black from head to toe, emitting a glow like mollusks. Although it looked like a living creature, I do not want to approach it. It seemed to be a creature evolved out of ways vastly different from us, such as from the depths of the ocean or outer space.

As if ‘it’ is, an alien.

I thought of this connection because of the backdrop here resembles the interior of a spaceship. Since this is a spaceship, then the creature inside it must be an alien. A very simplistic deduction. The room is very small, the size similar to the hospital room I was hospitalized in.

The walls, the floor, and the ceiling are all colored in pure white, as smooth as the inner side of an egg shell. Despite the sparking cleanness, they lack the feeling of pulsating life. Opposite to the objects that looked like windows, I see a multitude of stars. What I am seeing is different from the stars that I have seen before, for these stars are brighter, and closer.

It’s just like I’m orbiting in space.

Could it be, when I was taking treatment in my hospital room—The aliens came from down from the sky and abducted me? Ridiculous, yet, preposterous as the thought may be, could such things truly occur?

Events as strange and ludicrous as that can only occur in dreams.

Does this place also belong in the realm of dreams?

To think of it, Jung, who expertised in dreams, had an interest in aliens as well. He even published papers on the subject. The supernatural was Jung's interest, and one-third of his works are dedicated to the research on alchemy. However, Jung is not a creepy, gloomy psychic or impostor. Jung was trying to use the scientific method and his own theories to explain the supernatural.

Be it ghosts or monsters, superpowers or myths.

Be it aliens or UFOs.

As Jung saw it, they were born out of the collective unconsciousness that all humans share, things only the collective unconsciousness can observe. No matter where you are from, or what culture you grew up in, people have always witnessed the phantoms of gods or ghosts. Why would that happen? Why do mythologies from different cultures often reflect the same contents? That is because both gods and ghosts originated from the shared collective unconsciousness of human beings. This, is what Jung believes on the subject.

Gods, and aliens, are all born out of the enormous uneasiness from the hearts of people. Subconsciousness gives this uneasiness form, and makes it appear in our daydreams. Therefore, what people witnessed was not the physical form of an intelligent creature from outer space, but the 'uneasiness' that is given that name of 'aliens'. The most alien spottings occurred during the times of the World Wars. At the times, people lived their lives in horror and uneasiness, and that's the reason so many aliens appeared.

Gods and dreams, spirits and ghosts, things that only exist in imagination—are all signs of internal emotion such as fear, longing, joy, and sadness. They are like the symbols seen in dreams, only that they are visible in reality. People that are sorrowful or in a trance, can easily peek inside the subconscious, and mistake their presence as actual existence.

Most of the time, such things are the fear and uneasiness that humans refuse to face. That's why people would reject the existence of ghosts are real out of habit. Yet, such things exists in the collective unconsciousness In every individual. Only by facing it, and fighting bravely till it is conquered, can we accept them and become whole. Otherwise, if we treat the shadows as non-existent, our hearts will become more and more scarred, with more places gradually being blackened out, and the heart will never regain its wholeness.

One must face such things.

Then, this alien-like creature, what kind of shadow is it to me? I have sealed up something in my heart kept it hidden deep inside me. Did that part wake up, and called out to me at the top of its voice, "look over here", while coming closer to me with every approaching step? Is it angry because I always kept my eyes shut and pretended not to see it?

Towards the depths of the collective unconsciousness.

Towards the sealed-up dream, it waves its hand at me again.

No, was the scene I just witnessed truly reality? I cannot understand this anymore. I dreamed within a dream, and dreamed in the dream I dreamt up— In the multi-layered dreams, I cannot grasp my location. That doctor-like person, and the then transformed alien, could it be that they are both characters in my dream? Was I speaking to myself, then? I, cannot deny that possibility.

Sages exist in people's dreams. It is an existence wise and gracious, like that of a god. That existence will lead the lost and wayward "me" to safety. He would speak to me, teach me, and at times reveal to me the truth. That is the persona born from the collective unconsciousness, the existence that is in charge of educating the ego.

This doctor, this alien—could 'it' be the sage?

Was I taking an examination from the philosopher, the shared sage of humans who originated from the depths of my heart?

I can't understand this anymore.

By now, I have understood nothing.

“……?”

There came a sound.

A sound that wasn’t strong enough to shock me. Instead, the music was peaceful. It was the gentle music of a piano.

I turned my head, and saw Sensei (let’s just call it Sensei) taping the keys with its slippery fingers. Within the walls of the spaceship, a large piano I placed. The piano is the color of pure white, without a single stain on its surface, as if it is made out of spotless ivory.

Sensei, who looked like an alien inn every sense, faced the piano and played out a soothing tune. It tapped on the piano keys that looked like a computer keyboard holily.

The tune was a simple arrangement of notes. In every country, there exists myths, and in every country, there is music. Scales that have the ability to dissipate worry is a melody. A music like that drifted in this room. A graceful tune, a lullaby that makes people want to cuddle.

I sat down, out of exhaustion, at the corner of a room.

Not knowing when, a seat popped out of thin air and caught my falling body gently. In front of my eyes is a small desk of appropriate size. I curled my arms upon the table, which is as white as clean, pressed bed sheets, and stopped thinking.

My heartbeat, slowed into a peaceful pace.

As if I’m about to fall asleep.

Ah, I feel tired somehow—I want to rest, for just a little while.

Chapter 28: Die

It seemed like I've fallen asleep unknowingly.

Sleeping in a dream, strange as it is—It isn't rare, I've long grown used to it. Where does the dream end and reality begins, the boundary line between the two was blurred away, it doesn't matter anymore. The melody of the piano was too soothing, comforting, that I took a nap accidentally.

During this time, Sensei—The creature that resembles Sensei, after finding me napping, placed me in this place with a helpless expression on its face. It took me to a room that is connected to the piano room, and placed me upon a futuristically styled bed gently.

Although the bed appears to be rather hard, it was extremely comfortable to sleep on, causing me to fall asleep immediately. On the soft, puffy, warm bed—I lost consciousness.

Indistinctly, I felt Sensei patting my head and pulling the covers on for me.

He guarded me like a doting father, as if he is the archetype of a large internal element that supported my heart. A strong element that guides and protects me. Thinking of this, I slept soundly.

And, before I've completely fallen asleep, I've started thinking in the center of my self where the conscious and subconscious merges.

Actually, that doesn't count as thinking—Because I have known all along.

I know that I've been averting my gaze. Knowing that I saw it all, all along, and only pretended that I could not see.

The clues, they had always been around. The things I've remembered, sculpted out, unveiled… all of them pointed to one fact.

I have come face to face with that fact, here on the bed of this spaceship, in the

deepest place of the dream.

Just like a baby bird, waiting to break out of its shell.

To be born into this world. I accepted it, as if it is a process one must go through in order to live. So much time has passed, yet perhaps, in reality, it took only the blink of an eye. Understanding it, facing it, embracing it. I feel that that I must do this, I'm tired of running away endlessly.

What I have been hiding away all this time, is a small misfortune.

So small that the world won't weep for it, it is too common to be etched in history. It is a misfortune commonly found, a cliché full of pain and misery. Yet to me, personally, to my subconsciousness, to this world of dreams, that infinitesimal, common misfortune is a tragedy strong enough to destroy everything.

Yet, truth to be told, it is still a small, insignificant incident.

Rough interpersonal relationships, living in a high-paced society where it's difficult to catch one's breath, conflict between family numbers, disappointment, jealousy, and blame on friends. The body aching from the flu, lamenting over the talent and foresight one lacks, small persistences… These pains in life that everyone faces, they also reside in my heart.

Their pain is genuine, yet not strong enough for one to wish for death.

Despite it all, I've weathered these pains and walked all the way onwards, all the way to this point.

Yet, there was a final straw that tore everything apart, that broke me down.

Perhaps, I once had borne a child. Had been pregnant once. Within my body, there once resided a new life. That new life, is you. That child I call 'you'. The swaying braids is the symbol of the umbilical cord. That child never opened its eyes, as it is sleeping soundly in the waters. That is why you always kept your eyes shut, at that time—Perhaps, it must be.

The fetus is connected to the mother's womb, as they dream the same dreams.

The two of us, connected.

That is why we existed in the dream simultaneously. Normally, our roles should switch from one to the other like the passing of a baton, the inner and the outer, reality and dreams, the two perspectives should switch over. Yet I, am looking at you. Our existences are independent from each other, yet we dream the same dreams.

And that, is the key for revealing all the secrets.

At least, if you think of it this way, it would all make sense.

But you—died. Aborted, fallen down, dead. I had an abortion, perhaps. I refused to accept that fact. I refused to acknowledge it; I averted my gaze, and repressed that painful memory, sealing it away from myself, twisting my heart as a result.

Cracks appear. I break apart.

Then, I was sick.

You.

You—who I haven't had the chance to name.

I was supposed to shower you with all my love. You are the treasure I've found in this painful, suffocating world. I wanted to give you a hat and scarf as a present, to hold your small hands and show you the wonders of this world. I wanted to read you storybooks and laugh by your side.

But, I cannot touch you.

Never, again.

You were aborted out of my body, falling away, dead.

I can no longer dream in my sleep.

That, is my presumption.

My conclusion.

My interpretation.

I’ve finished collecting the symbols scattered in my dreams, the things that I have a special impression on, the things I call ‘Effects’—and pieced my heart back up. When I placed the final piece of the puzzle, I remembered everything. My subconscious cannot bear it all, and jumped off the balcony, to meet its death by falling into pieces.

You, walked further and further away from me.

I cannot reach you, even if I’ve stretched out my hand.

Not God, nor all the king’s horses and all the king’s men, can bring Humpty Dumpty together again after it fell down from the wall. The dream kept falling, tumbling through the air, dropping downwards… till it smashed the ground, cracked, and flew apart like an egg. All that remained of my future was the looming darkness and flecks of blood.

How I wanted to live with you.

I should have given you so much love.

If you left my womb smoothly—If you were safely born into the world, how wonderful that would be. Once the umbilical cord is cut, the connection between you and me will break, and we won’t dream the same dreams any longer.

But that’s okay. It’s alright, because I wish you can live on in reality, not in dreams.

It’s alright if I do not exist in your dreams.

But, it was you who disappeared.

What remained, with the empty, shattered shell of a body, is me.

Chapter 29: Live

All of a sudden, I had a strange feeling.

When I came to my senses, I've fallen into a deep sleep. My conscious is gradually swallowed away by darkness, drenched comfortably in the void. I don't want to think or feel anything anymore, all I hope for is to stay in this death-like silence.

Yet.

I feel as if that kind Sensei have lit up the lights for me in this slowing darkening bottom of conscious—I was aware of a certain presence, like rising to the surface slowly from the depths of the sea.

Taking back my consciousness, regaining my self.

Reacting to external stimulus.

A voice pierced my ears. A high, strong call, the sound of a siren. As if an emergency occurred. Is this the end, then? Swallowed by darkness, returning to oblivion, isn't this a fine ending? Stop bothering me. I hate it. I want to just lie here, quietly, on this bed. To feel nothing. To think of nothing. To be free from all stimuli.

I've wept tears, have had blood bleed out from my wounds. I'm tired.

But the sound of the sirens were like a ringing alarm clock, as if it's telling me that there is still a follow-up to this ending, telling me that there are still things left unfinished. As if it wants to tell me, it's far too early to be slumbering, to lose consciousness, to stop thinking.

So I sat up unwillingly.

I rubbed my eyes, yawned, and stretched my arms.

Then I stared ahead.

There’s no way to sleep like this.

I threw aside the covers, and hopped out of bed. It seemed that something terrible has happened. Like that of a warning, an emergency alarm. A red light blinked, accompanying the sound of the sirens. Clearly, something bad has happened.

Not the time for sleeping.

The red light blinked like visualized pain, hurting my eyes. I felt unnerved and looked around. My vision is blurry, the ground shakes under my feet, it’s hard to walk steadily. It’s hard to move forward in the shaking spaceship. So, I returned to the room with the piano.

Inside, the sirens rang non-stop.

In the small room, the alien, who is perhaps my prototype or my shadow, hurried around busily. Prototypes are supposed to be peaceful symbols. Then, why is he so flustered, running around like a headless chicken?

This is a situation where wits and strength are useless. It seemed that he is clueless as to how to deal with the situation. That’s why he’s so disconcerted.

I’m speechless.

What on earth happened here?

A shake—strong enough to shatter everything, to break dreams… even my subconscious. The spaceship seemed to be falling downwards. The body of the ship started slanting and plunged under, gaining speed. Gravity compressed my body, making me unable to stand, so I tumbled and lay on the ship’s floor.

During this time, it seemed that the alien-like Sensei have crashed into the tumbling piano.

A strange sound emitted from the collision.

My useless shadow. Shadows have no weight, so there’s nothing they can do

when threatened by reality. My breathing is messy. All I can do is hope to calm down, and prepare myself.

For a frightening crash is about to come.

A deafening boom.

The spaceship has crashed into something. I understood this, as if I'm seeing this happen from someplace far up. The spaceship landed boldly on a desolate planet, its form twisted and flattened from the crash.

Yet, the body of the ship seemed to be rather steady, as if did not break apart after the collision. I was flung into the air, and rebounded between the floor and the ceiling. I felt as if I would vomit all my internal organs. It's a miracle that I'm still alive.

And then, the spaceship finally stopped moving.

It is stuck vertically upon the planet like a gravestone.

I can see this through the spaceship window. The spaceship is stranded on this desolate and dead planet. The aftershock still stirred the ground, yet I cannot see anything that is alive and moving outside.

Groaning, I tried lifting my body. I'm hurt all over as my blood flowed like streams. I feel as if all my bones are broken. This doesn't hurt, this doesn't hurt, nope, not hurting at all… It's just like the usual, I tell myself this repetitively, I must bear down this pain.

I often hear people say that endurance is no good. One must face the pain and the shock, deal with them, work at it, with a upbeat attitude at heart. That, must be what people call bravery. To have the guts to fight fiercely with external stimulus.

I kicked away the alien whose head is stuck firmly into the floor, and walked in the direction of the exit of the spaceship. Before reality, aliens and supernatural phenomenon are useless, there isn't any point to hide away in fantasy. I can only fight this world, with my arms and legs that might fall apart at any moment, with my eyes that are nearly rotting away

There is a staircase that leads outside. Careful not to make any mistakes, I descended the stairs.

I left the spaceship, a place safe and comfortable as the inside of an egg, and walked outside.

The world outside is as hopeless and desolate as what I saw out from the window, a complete wilderness. No conspicuous landmarks, nothing that can come in handy, nothing at all. A desert that stretches as far as the eye can see, only sporadic rocks are scattered in the sand… A lifeless, sterile wasteland.

There is a strip of land that looked like a road. I walked over, boosting up courage, and stepped forward. The ground is uneven, easy to trip and fall over. I can see no destination up ahead, no ending for my journey aside from the faraway horizon that has no end. It's painful to walk.

Yet, I have no other choice but to walk down this road.

The spaceship will not move anymore.

Therefore, I have to walk on my own.

Perhaps, this is what they mean by being alive.

Walking all alone in the wilderness with no promise of safety.

Everyone lives out their lives like this. And I must do so, as well. Even though the past me had ran away for countless of times, I cannot act like a spoiled child any longer. I have this feeling. I want to walk forward like a martyr.

A holy melody echoed in the air.

It didn't bring me discomfort. The melody mollified my pain, easing my thoughts, like a surge of endorphin. That melody supported me to walk forward.

There are no short cuts, no transporting doors or effects for me to use, no one to take my hand and lead the way. I can only walk on. On my own. Onwards, onwards.

To be alive.

Breathe, look forward, and walk on.

That’s all I can do.

I don’t know what lies ahead, what awaits me at the end of my journey. Yet, I must go on, endure the pain that comes in my way. Perhaps there is nothing at the final destination. I might also fall down from the exhaustion, and put an end to all things just like that.

The roads started slanting upwards till they are nearly vertical with the ground.

The steep angle is impossible to walk on. I would fall, pulled down by gravity no matter how I see it. Yet, I kept putting one foot after the other. Wiping the sweat from my brow, panting, enduring this painful work, I continued. To live.

With my feet placed firmly on the ground, I walked on.

Gradually, the scenery changes.

The ending appeared before my eyes.

Final Chapter: I am no longer in your dream

At last, I reached the end of the slope.

I came to the summit.

Looking around, I realized that I’m standing on a remarkably lofty mountain. It seems that I’ve reached its highest peak. There is a small clearing, and on it, is a small hole emitting puffs of smoke that makes me sleepy, filling me up with happiness.

The hole looked like the crater of a volcano. Lava, the life force of Earth itself, seemed possible to come bursting out any moment. It also looked like a secret passage leading to wonderland. Yet, that hole is too small for me to enter, unless some kind of miracle takes place. Even if all magic is used up, all mysteries lining up and solved, the cave of reality ,cannot be enlarged one bit.

However, I succeeded in entering the cave. Having no other place to go, I can only squeeze up my body and press hard into the hole. I turned smaller as I cut off my hands, my head, and everything. Nope, instead, I concentrated myself like a gem, throwing away the unnecessary things and keeping only the most precious things deep in my heart.

I tried several times.

Each time I felt like I wanted to quit, a new courage is born inside me.

I tried with all my might.

Suddenly, I fell in— inside the hole.

I was unable to adjust my position, and my buttocks crashed onto the ground. The terrible pain tore a wail out of me, yet it doesn’t hurt, doesn’t hurt, bear down, endure… I gritted my teeth, keeping down the pain and shock that rolled over my body like the tires of a truck.

I sat up.

There is a staircase before me. One rusty, unreliable staircase that might collapse at any minute. Its winding steps spun towards the distant center of the planet, like the spiral of the DNA. It leads downwards, to the depths.

I don’t know where it will lead me to. But, it’s the only path I can take. There is no turning back. And so I stepped downwards nervously, the stairs creaking with every step I take, making unsettling noises, as if I’m walking on a dangerous wire.

At the end, the stairs broke off suddenly, and I started falling again. Only this time, the fall wasn’t as long, so the ground flew right up to my face. Having n time to dodge, I hit the floor with my face facing down.

I kept down my tears, and stood up with one hand supporting my body.

Although my clothes are ragged and stained with mud, at least I have reached the center of the dream. The abyss that is under the abyss within an abyss. A place where, normally, would be impossible for me to reach. I must have fallen inside the collective unconscious.

In front of me is a large, damaged machine.

A gigantic machine that looked like a car. The flesh, the living being, they are the carriers of the gene. This machine is like the symbol of such a carrier. A car that is completely broken down, unable to have the engine running. A heap of unmovable scrap metal if it’s not properly fixed.

A badly damaged machine.

Yet, here it remains.

I touched the machine with a shaky hand, and thought as I walked. Broken down, sick, tired, given up on life; This, this is my heart, my life. I am not a strong, stable, reliable carrier. I’ve lived on, dragging with me this broken down body, emitting sparks as I walk.

Yet—

Suddenly, I felt as if I’ve mistaken something of great importance.

Although the carrier is badly damaged, here it still remains. Can it still be used, should it be given up, they all depend on my own decision. No, since the very start—wasn’t everything, after all, decided on my own whims?

This, is my dream.

My subconscious.

My heart.

The girl in the hat and scarf, the existence of the monochrome sisters, and that Sensei, they are all residents in my dream. They are my shadows. They only tell me the things I’ve already known, but these things are not necessarily all true.

I was blamed, and chided by my shadows- the enemies of the ego, till I conceived the notion of giving up. But, isn’t that a form of escape? Of running away? I broke down, gotten sick, because my beloved child was lost in miscarriage. That was the truth I believed in all along.

But what if, that is not the truth?

What if that thought was only my subconscious calling out through the shadows, nothing more than sheer anxiety? What if the facts and reality I believed in weren’t true?

What if I was a pregnant woman who is anxious and mentally stressed, not knowing if the baby can be safely born into the world, not knowing if the baby can be properly loved by myself? Scared of miscarrying and losing the baby? No, I had thought that if the child died, it would turn out to be a better outcome. The thought even eases me a little.

Because the final outcome would not hurt if I had given up and despaired in the first place.

To protect my heart, I pretended I will not be able to see my soon-to-be-born baby alive.

But that was terrible. I regret it so much.

I’m sorry, for being so weak, for giving up so easily,. I’m sorry, because you—

You, have been here all along.

I lifted my head. Up ahead, there is a gigantic creature that looked like a complete monster. A monster that curled up its body and wouldn’t stop moaning… But, it only appeared that way because of my twisted heart.

It is like a fetus. Unable to protect itself, weak, delicate, and sensitive. A beautiful life. At the bottom of dreams, tucked carefully away in the depths of my heart, is you. II walked towards it.

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I apologized over and over.

I’m so sorry.

I won’t forget you again. Won’t hide you in this place, won’t pretend not to see. You won’t be lonely anymore. I will always stay by your side. I walked towards the creature who is shaped like a fetus. I hugged it tightly, feeling its warmth on my body.

How warm.

Somehow, I felt like falling asleep.

Sometimes, dreams can foretell the future.

Out of accidental consistency, intuition, prophesies, foresight… That is why, I could have mistaken the prophesized future of you dying from miscarriage, the worst possible scenario, as the truth.

But, I will try not to make it happen.

I will muster up my courage and hug you tight.

To protect you.

Till the moment you disappear from my dreams—Till the moment you safely leave my tummy, I will keep on holding you tight, like this.

I will no longer lock you up in nightmares, but free you, safe and sound.

The day will come when you and I stop seeing the same dreams.

I will not be in your dreams.

Nor you in mine.

—That’s why, we will say our farewells in this dream.

But, I will meet you again in reality.

Listening to the cries of your birth.

You will open your eyes, and see me.

And I will speak to you, in a voice full of joy, “Good morning”.

Yume Nikki

I'm Not In Your Dream

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Chapter 01-10 - DreamlessWindow
Chapter 11-16 - Pudding321
Chapter 17-29 and Last Chapter - Amanitashreds
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